



## FELLOWSHIP IN LOVE - 1 JOHN 3

### INTRODUCTION

The first two chapters of 1 John have been an encouragement to fellowship with God and with His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. John has presented the truth of Christian doctrine and exhorted his readers to abide in the truth. He has shown that fellowship must take place in the light because God is light, and fellowship takes place in Jesus Christ because He is our Advocate and our abiding place.

John has pointed out that those who abide in Christ, in the light of God, love their brothers (1 John 2:10), but do not love the world (1 John 2:15). In chapter three, he expands upon the subject of love. He reminds his readers that Christians are to fellowship in love. Christians are to love one another because God first loved us by bestowing upon us the privilege of becoming His dear children. Love is the basis of fellowship with God and with other believers. God's children are to demonstrate God's love in their lives by loving one another. This results in confidence to approach God with assurance that He answers our prayers and confidence that we abide in Him.

### OUTLINE OF 1 John 3

- I. God Has Shown His Love for Us -  
1 John 3:1-10
- II. God's Children Show Love to One Another -  
1 John 3:11-18
- III. God's Children Have Confidence -  
1 John 3:19-24

#### I. God has Shown His Love For Us - 1 John 3:1-10

- A. We Are His Children - 1 John 3:1

The kind and quality of God's love for us is so great that He has named us children of God! He is not ashamed to call us His sons and daughters and to be known as our Father. *He predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will* (Ephesians 1:5). *We are no longer slaves but sons and heirs of God through Christ* (Galatians 4:7). *He has surely shown that His banner over us is love* (Song of Solomon 2:4)!

Because we are His children, the recipients of His love, the world does not know us. The world does not comprehend the joy of the spiritual blessings God's children possess. (Read Paul's description of those

blessings in Ephesians 1.) To the world, we are outsiders and often misunderstood. But that should not surprise us because the world did not recognize or understand God's Son Jesus either.

- B. We Shall Be Like Him - I John 3:2-3

Even though we are God's children here and now, there is something even better in store for us in the future. When Jesus comes again, we know that we will be like Him. God has not revealed all the wonders inherent in this statement, but we know that we will see Jesus in all of His glory and we will be glorified together with Him (Romans 8:17). *Jesus Christ will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself* (Philippians 3:21).

In a sense we are already like Jesus in that we are children of God. Humankind was created in the wonderful image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:26 and 9:6). Sadly that image was damaged because of the fall of Adam and Eve and the resulting misery of sin in our lives. Jesus came to restore us and remake us into His image. Those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are called to reflect His glory as that transformation is taking place in our lives (2 Corinthians 3:18). In the future, we will know and experience the fullness of what we now know and experience only in part. The glory of the Lord will be fully revealed and fully reflected in us. What an awesome thought! What a marvelous hope!

- C. We Should Purify Ourselves - I John 3:3-10

John says that those who have this hope within them will strive for purity in their lives because they will want to be like Jesus who is pure. Those who have the hope of being like Jesus will be encouraged to live like He lived, without sin.

- 1. Abstain from sin - 3:4-10

- a. Definition of sin - 3:4

John calls sin *lawlessness*, a word which implies more than just breaking the law. *Lawlessness* has the connotation of rebellion against the will of God in conformity with the work of satan, also known as the devil. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10 and Paul's description of the *lawless one*. He is also called the *man of sin* and the *son of perdition*. He opposes and exalts himself above God, practices unrighteous deception, and works in compliance with the activity of satan. Have you ever

thought of sin as taking satan's side in rebellion against God? That is exactly what it is. The next time you are tempted to sin, consider whose side you are on.

b. Reasons to abstain - 3:5-10

Sin is not to be taken lightly. First, *whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness* (1 John 3:4). As has just been explained, that means exalting oneself above God and becoming a fellow-worker with satan (the devil).

Secondly, God has shown His opposition to sin by sending His Son into the world to take away our sins (1 John 3: 5). The Son is sinless (1 John 3:5), He is righteous (1 John 2:1), and He is pure (1 John 3:3). He is *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29).

Thirdly, *whoever abides in Him* (Christ) *does not sin* (verse 6). Sin can never be a part of abiding in Christ. Look back to 1 John 2:1 to recall John's reason for writing: *That you may not sin*. Believers simply do not make a **habit** of sinning so that their lives are characterized by sin. When a Christian becomes conscious of sin in his life (through the convicting power of the indwelling Holy Spirit), he does not make excuses and continue to sin, but confesses his sin so he may be forgiven and cleansed from his unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). In that way he continues to abide in Christ and live a righteous life.

John gives a fourth reason to abstain from sin. In verses 8-10, he sees the world as divided into two groups of people — *children of God* and *children of the devil*. Those who sin are children of the devil because they succumb to the devil's desires and imitate the devil in his actions. Jesus came to destroy (literally to dissolve or demolish) the works of the devil (John 12:31; Luke 10:18; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 12:9). Since Christ is in opposition to the works of the devil, it follows that God's children would not be involved in any of those works, and therefore would not sin. Furthermore, God's children have God's seed in them — that is, the very nature of God indwells them and so they cannot live in sin. For children of God, sin is abnormal and unnatural and against their true nature (Ephesians 4:22-24 and 2 Peter 1:4). When God's children become aware of sin in their lives, they confess their sin and God is faithful to forgive and cleanse (1 John 1:9). God's perfect intent for every believer is freedom from sin, even though the present reality is that all will fall short. (John has already made it clear in 1 John 1:8 that those who claim to have no sin are liars who deceive themselves.) The tendency to sin will always be a reality in this present world, but through the grace of God, Christians have the power to overcome temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13 and 2 Peter 2:9).

2. Application

If you are seeking, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to abide in Christ and your desire is to be transformed into all that God intends you to be, do not lose heart because you are conscious of sin in your life. Be encouraged that Christ lives in you, His power is at work in you, and through His power you can overcome sin. In his book, *The Bible Speaks to Our Times*, Alan Redpath points out that "Jesus has not only saved us from the penalty of our sins but also from the power of sin in our lives. He bases this on Romans 6:6 — *Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*" As a Christian, you need no longer be controlled by the power of sin. Your old evil desires were nailed to the cross with Jesus. You now have access to a greater power — the power of God working in you through the Holy Spirit. In Christ you are sin-free. Become what you already are by yielding your life day by day, moment by moment, to the power of Christ which dwells within you.

**II. God's Children Show Love -  
1 John 3:11-18**

God's children should reflect the love of their Father. The Father's love is manifest through His children as they love others. In these verses John gives his readers a reminder of the command to love, an example of what love is not, the perfect example of what love is, and an exhortation to love in practical ways.

A. The Message Heard From the Beginning -  
1 John 3:11

This was the message which Jesus Christ brought — the message that we should *love one another* (John 13:34 and 15:12). It was part of the original gospel message preached to the first recipients of this letter, and John has already written that it is a necessary characteristic of those who abide in the light (1 John 2:10).

B. Negative Example of Cain - 1 John 3:12-15  
and Genesis 4:2-10

In contrast to those who love one another is Cain who murdered his brother in anger because of jealousy and hurt pride. Cain's brother, Abel, was righteous and presented a more excellent sacrifice to God (Hebrews 11:4) whereas Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable. It was a sacrifice of convenience and not what God commanded. Cain's actions were evil and showed that he was of the wicked one, a child of the devil.

Cain was wicked and hated his righteous brother. Times have not changed. Throughout history the wicked world has hated those who are righteous. It should not be a

surprise to Christians to find themselves as the object of the world's hatred.

Christians do not hate, rather they love one another. This is a sign of the spiritual life they possess. Christians have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14). We were dead in our trespasses and sins, and God in His mercy made us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:1-5). We were dead, but now we have eternal life, and our love for one another is a sign of that truth in our lives. Do you show love for fellow Christians or are you filled with anger, hurt, and resentment toward others? John says, *he who does not love his brother abides in death* (1 John 3:14). A lack of love is an indication of lack of spiritual life. Each one should examine his own actions. In what ways do your actions display love for others?

In God's eyes, hatred is just as much a sin as murder. *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer* (1 John 3:15). Jesus said, *You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder,' and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire* (Matthew 5:21-22). A person who hates others is therefore like Cain, a child of the devil and a murderer. Such a person cannot have eternal life abiding in him.

### C. Positive Example of Christ - 1 John 3:16-18

Jesus Christ is not only the perfect example of love, He is the definition of love. It is because of Him that we know what love is. Love is not taking life, rather love is giving life.

#### 1. He laid down His life for us - 3:16

Jesus said, *Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends* (John 15:13). Not only did He say it, He did it — and in that is the essence of love. He gave His own life so that the world of sinful humanity, which includes you and me, might have eternal life. He was willing to do whatever it took. His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane was, *not My will, but Yours, be done* (Luke 22:42). Jesus showed us that love means willingness and readiness to do anything that God wills, regardless of one's own desires and feelings. Love is self-sacrifice. Love is dying to self so that God may work His perfect will through you.

#### 2. We also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren - 3:16b-18

This is a radical statement, but Jesus' whole life displayed radical love. If we claim to be His followers,

that same radical love should be evident in our lives. Just how far are you willing to go to lay down your life for a Christian brother or sister? How much of your own comfort, pleasure, money, or time are you willing to sacrifice so that others might experience the love of Christ through you? To what extent are you willing to deny yourself in order to show love to other people — to your parents, your husband, your wife, your children, your neighbor, your pastor, your friend, or a even a stranger? John gives encouragement in laying down one's life by giving practical examples of what it means to love.

#### a. Share what you have - 3:17

True Christian love is giving to those who have less. It is seeing someone in need and being moved to help. It is those who have helping those who have not. Love is practical and it comes from the heart, springing forth from the love of God which abides there. Do you know someone who is needy? Would you be able to help that person if you sacrificed some excess or luxury in your own life? Will you do that? I. Howard Marshall, The Epistles of John, says, "The need of the world is not for heroic acts of martyrdom but for heroic acts of material sacrifice." How will you help meet the needs of others in your corner of the world this week and on a continuing basis?

#### b. Love in deed and in truth, not in word only - 3:18

Christian love is expressed by what one does, not by what one says. It's easy to talk about loving someone and easy to talk about doing something for someone else, but the true test of love is in our actions. If the truth is in us, it will be poured out in love. Love displayed is evidence of faith.

In Luke 7, the account is given of a Pharisee named Simon who invited Jesus to dinner at his house. When Jesus arrived, Simon did not give Him the customary kiss of greeting. He didn't give Him water to wash His feet. He did not anoint His head with oil. However, after Jesus had gone in and sat down at the table, a woman of the streets arrived. She is identified only as a sinner. She entered Simon's home and made her way to Jesus where she began to weep and wash His feet with her tears. She wiped His feet with her own hair, kissed them, and anointed them with costly oil she had brought with her. The woman poured out her love on Jesus. She didn't have to speak a word because her actions were a living witness to the truth which dwelt within her. Her faith was seen in her actions. As Christians, we are to pour out our love on one another as evidence of the truth which dwells within us. How is the truth displayed in your life through love?

### III. God's Children Have Confidence - 1 John 3:19-24

Obedience to God's command to love gives believers an inner confidence.

#### A. Confidence That We Are of the Truth - 1 John 3:19

When we express love for others in practical and positive ways, it gives us assurance that we are God's children and not of *the wicked one* (1 John 3:12) as was Cain. When we live in the light of God's love by loving others, then we have confidence that we belong to the truth.

#### B. Confidence That We May Approach God - 1 John 3:20-21

Even when our hearts are conscious of sin in our lives, we may be assured that God is greater, more powerful, and more merciful than we could ever fathom. He has reconciled us to Himself through the death of His beloved Son in order that we might stand before Him holy and blameless (Colossians 1:21-23). Because of His mercy and grace He accepts us even when our own hearts are overcome by the pain of our shortcomings. The apostle Peter denied Christ three times. Later, after Jesus had asked Peter for the third time, *Do you love Me?* Peter responded, *Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You* (John 21:17). Peter understood that Jesus saw beyond his words of denial in a crisis situation. Jesus knew his true commitment. God sees beyond the failures of your human nature. He knows all things. He knows your true condition and commitment. Your heart need not condemn you, rather you may have confidence to approach Him. This confidence is born of a heart commitment to obedience.

#### C. Confidence That God Answers Prayer - 1 John 3:22-23

John says, *whatever we ask we receive from Him* (1 John 3:22). Later in his letter he clarifies that statement by emphasizing that we must also ask according to God's will (1 John 5:14). Of course, as God's children, it should be our desire to ask in accordance with His will, since we know He is a loving Father (1 John 3:1). In this passage, John qualifies his statement by adding that we receive what we ask for because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

He then sums up God's commandments in a single command with two parts: *believe on the name of Jesus Christ* and *love one another*. Faith in Jesus Christ and love for others go together. They are inseparably intertwined as the very basis for confident Christian living.

#### D. Confidence That We Abide in Him - 1 John 3:24

Through faith and love we abide in God and He abides in us. It is an intimate fellowship between Father and child, and we can be sure of this abiding fellowship through the witness of the Holy Spirit He has given us. The apostle Paul explained it this way in Romans 8:16, *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*.

### Applications

1. Do you know with complete confidence that you are God's own child? Do you know that you are loved by Him beyond measure?
2. Who are the recipients of God's love through you?
3. Do you have confidence when you go to God in prayer because you love Him, keep His commandments, and live to please Him?
4. How are purity, righteousness and love being displayed in your life and causing you to stand out as different from the world?
5. Do you have some habitual sin in your life which is interfering with your fellowship with Christ and other believers? Will you confess that sin now? Will you trust God to forgive and cleanse you from unrighteousness because you are His child?