

INTRODUCTION

One of the problems with breaking the book of 1 John into smaller sections in the way I have been doing as I have gone through this book is that it is sometimes difficult to get the flow of the whole book. As I have said on numerous occasions during this series 1 John is not an easy book to understand because the thought patterns are very mixed and the same subject is dealt with on many different occasions.

Last time however we spoke about God being love and one of the implications of that truth is that we ought to love those who God loves and in doing so people will see God in the church and in the individual believers (vs.11-12). This section carries on from that thought and continues to deal with the subject of assurance. How do I know that God loves me? The answer that John gives is that we live in God and he in us (vs. 13, 15-16). We have all sorts of problems with a concept like that in our culture were we are accustomed to judging everything by our senses.

We cannot see God (v 12) because God is Spirit (John 4:24). We cannot touch him or hear him in an audible way therefore we need other evidences in order for us to be sure that God lives in us and we in him. John gives us that evidence in these verses.

1. WE HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT (v 13)

This is a sign that God lives in us and we in God. If we possess his Holy Spirit then we know that we have a relationship with God, it is a case of God's Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16). But we must be careful that we put all the tests that John gives us in this book together. We cannot separate them and say that because we pass one of them we are Christians for how would any of us prove someone's claim that they possess the Holy Spirit.

The answer lies in the fact that the Holy Spirit will always produce in us something of the character of God. So holiness, and righteousness will be important to us and we will pursue such things. But love will also be important to us for the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to love others unselfishly. All these tests must be put together but in the immediate context of these verses the love that we show to others is evidence that the Holy Spirit lives in us and if that is the case then we must also be in a living relationship with God.

For the false teachers receiving the Holy Spirit was about receiving a special anointing with intimate and secret knowledge but for John it is about holding to the truth as we will see in a minute and it's about love for others. The question is, is there evidence of the Spirit within our lives? If there is then we are Christians if there is not then we are not Christians no matter what we might think. However John gives other evidences in which we can test ourselves to see if we have received the Holy Spirit and therefore have God living in us and us living in God. If love was the only evidence then it would be possible for people who show tremendous love to others sometimes at great cost to themselves to claim to be Christians without believing the truth.

2. WE BELIEVE THE TRUTH (vs. 14-15)

John goes back to his eyewitness account and states once again what the apostles saw and as a result testified that Jesus was sent by his Father to be the Saviour of the world. Therefore here is the application; everyone who believes the apostolic truth concerning Jesus demonstrates by his belief that God lives in him and he in God. As I said before in previous sermons John picks out one doctrine that probably was being attacked by the false teachers but the point is that only those who believe the truth are truly people who have received the Spirit and therefore can be assured of their salvation.

So that loving others is not the only test but love and truth must go together. But John is not talking just about truth as a body or system of truth only but the word 'acknowledges' means more than an acceptance of historical facts it means to be committed to it; to outwardly confess it and to inwardly be convinced and convicted that this is true. It is to respond in faith to this Jesus and acknowledge that Jesus is not just the Saviour of the world in some general sense but my personal Saviour from sin.

There are people who will willingly acknowledge that Jesus is Saviour of the world but somehow fail to acknowledge their own personal need of a Saviour. They are happy to believe the bible's testimony about Jesus but yet fail to acknowledge their own sin and their need of salvation. Such people might even show remarkable love towards others but without a personal; commitment to God's truth such people cannot be true Christians. We live in an age when doctrine does not matter what matters is experience and love.

We see this within the ecumenical movement what really matters is that we love one another and demonstrate that love in joint worship services. They say we need to stress what we have in common rather than our differences, but you will not find that sort of language in this letter or anywhere else in the bible for that matter. We can have much in common but unless we have the key issue of salvation by grace alone through faith alone then we are simply presenting another gospel.

But of course John is writing to encourage the true church who have doubts about their salvation placed there by the false teachers. John says do you believe what the apostles believe? They witnessed Jesus in the flesh they wrote down what they saw and heard and they did this under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Are we as a church holding firm to that truth? Are we as individuals committed to it, if so then God lives in us and we in him?

3. WE HAVE CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S LOVE (vs. 16-19).

When a couple get married one of things that they are looking for in their marriage is reliability. Will this person's love for me be reliable when things are going against us when times are difficult and when I am old and wrinkly? Well John says that we can be sure that God's love will be reliable we can depend upon it in all the changing scenes of life. This is because God's love is grounded in his unchanging nature (God is Love) and as we live day by day as Christians then God proves to us the truth of that statement as we experience the love of God in so many practical ways.

We find that during days of difficulty and trials God demonstrates his love to us, but of course we will only be able to see this if we are committed in faith to him. The more we experience God's love on a daily basis then the more we will rely upon his love for us. John now makes the application once again whoever has this confidence and reliance upon God's love demonstrates that God lives in them and they in God (v 16). It is one thing to say that you have faith that you believe that God is love but it is a completely different thing to prove it on a daily basis especially in days when it seems that everything is going against us.

But the people who are relying on the love of God everyday prove that they are Christians. What this means in practice is that as we develop our relationship with God we learn to trust him more and more, we discover in many different ways that God is love and therefore when our circumstances seem to be shouting at us that God is not love we will continue to rely upon his love and refuse to curse God and die. Job is a perfect example of this that although he had no idea why he was suffering and although everyone was blaming him he refused to stop believing and trusting in God.

He knew that God is love even though his own circumstances seem to be contradicting what he knew was true. If you have ever been close to someone who is relying upon God's love on their deathbed then you will know what John means by this statement. Such people have a tremendous sense of God's love, even though they might be in great pain and even though they might be confused as to why they are suffering yet they refuse to give up on God they refuse to disbelieve that God is love. When they are tempted to do so they often look to the cross and see again the love of God for them in Christ Jesus. So what about us? Do we everyday trust in God and his love for us in Christ Jesus? For those of us who are longer on the Christian pathway have we learnt through the trials of life that God is love?

If so then we can pass that knowledge on to others, perhaps those who are younger in the faith especially when they face the trials of life and are tempted to doubt God's love for them.

But whether we are more mature Christians or just baby Christians we can rely upon the love of God and if we are doing that every day at School in work or at home then that is evidence that God lives in us and we in him. When we rely upon the love of God in this way God's love has reached its goal in our lives for that is what is meant by the word complete (v17). When we have confidence in God's love when daily we rely upon his love then that love and that sort of confidence will have a double effect upon us.

a) We will have confidence concerning the judgement day (v 17). We know that God is love we know that God demonstrated his love to us by sending His only Son into the world to be our Saviour. We know from personal experience that we can rely upon God's love that he will always love us through good times and bad times. We know that his love to us in Christ means that we are saved and will never be lost as long as we truly belong to him. This means that we will persevere in faith through days of blessing and days of difficulty. But ultimately the fact that God is love and that his love can be relied upon means that we can have complete confidence that come the judgement day we will not be cast into hell but will be welcomed into heaven.

The reason for such confidence is not because of who we are or what we have done but because in this world we are like Christ.

This means that our heavenly Father looks upon us as he looks upon his own beloved Son. How does Jesus approach his Father? With complete confidence of course knowing that he will not be turned away or will not be welcomed into his Father's presence? Therefore we can have complete confidence come the judgement day, we do not need to dread such a day but because God's love can be relied upon then we know that God will not judge us for our sin because God in Christ has forgiven us from all our unrighteousness (1:9).

When we do sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One (2:1) therefore we can be confident that we will be forgiven on the basis of Christ atoning work and that the judgement day will not be one of fear for the Christian. This leads on to the second effect that such confidence has upon us.

b) We will not fear God (v18) – Now once we have this confidence that God is love and that his love can be trusted and relied upon then we will not fear God. Now we need to be careful here for there is a right fear of God that every Christian ought to have a fear that means that God is given the respect and reverence that he should have in our lives. A fear that means we never become too familiar with him so that we see him as our buddy.

It's the fear that every Child ought to have for their earthly father one that respects their role and position in life. It is this right fear of God that will remind us that He is God and we are his creation. However it is not this type of fear that John is talking about. He is talking about a fear that dreads God, a fear that is terrified that God will punish us every time we sin. But when we learn to depend

upon God's love to us then we will know that our God will not punish us for our sins because he has already punished his Son in our place.

Therefore we do not need to have any sense of dread of God, we do not need to fear him with this terrified sense of fear for we know that he is our loving and gracious heavenly Father. For many sensitive and often immature Christians this fear of God can paralyse their faith. They can so easily live waiting for some calamity to strike in judgement because they are aware of their sins before God. They might regret the fact that they do not make as much progress in holiness as they would like and as a result they wait and expect God to be angry with them by bringing some disaster into their lives.

Their picture of God is one of a father with a big stick just looking for every opportunity to beat us with it. Of course the devil then takes such fears and plays upon them and accuses Christians of all sorts of wrongs and puts doubts into their minds that they cannot be Christians because of their sins and failings. But John says that we can have confidence that God will not punish us because he has punished Christ therefore we can have complete confidence in God's love and we do not need to fear him but his love can be relied upon.

So these are the marks of assurance for the Christian. We have the Holy Spirit, we believe the truth we have confidence in the Love of God for us in Christ. But there is one more piece of evidence and with it we do a full circle and finish where we finished last time.

4. WE LOVE OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS (vs. 19-21)

This is how we respond to God's love for us (v 19). We love because he first loved us. But the fact that we do love our fellow Christians is a sure sign that God lives in us and we in him. It's so easy to say we love God but loving his people shows love for God. To claim to love God yet hate his people simply doesn't fit for such claims are proven to be false. This is what the false teachers were saying yet they hated the true church therefore the conclusion drawn is that they are not true Christians.

The logic behind this is that it is much easier to love someone who you have seen than to love someone you cannot see (v 20). If you cannot love your fellow Christians who you can see and talk to how can we claim to love God who is unseen? God commands us to love him but we can only love him if we love his people. Both God and his people go together, failure to love one is failure to love the other. If we love our fellow Christians then this is a sure sign we are Christians, if we do not love one another it is a sure sign we do not love God and are not Christians.

But John wants to encourage the church to be assured of their salvation. We therefore ought not to look too closely at our relationships within the church. Yes there might be one or two that you struggle to really love but is the overall picture one of genuine love for other believers. Is there a desire for the well being of our fellow Christians? If so then that is simply further evidence that we are true believers that God lives in us and we in him.

Therefore let's be assured of our salvation if:

- a) We have received the Holy Spirit. Is there evidence?
- b) We believe the truth.
- c) We have confidence in God's love
- d) We love our fellow Christians

Amen