

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST JOHN

CHILDREN OF GOD AND CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL!

Read 1 John 3:7-15

Introduction

It's amazing that we Christians need to hear the message, the command, of love so often – and still we don't get it. Our churches are full of selfish, bickering people. The world knows the church for its judgmentalism and rigidity, not for its love and joy. How very sad. So, it is important, my brother, my sister, that you don't let the message of love slip off your consciousness like water off a duck's back. Don't be waterproof to God's message for you!

It's likely that John's opponents in Ephesus were characterized by their hatred of the faithful, orthodox Christian community. But it's also likely that the true Christians were responding in an unloving manner, too.

Destroying the Devil's Work

“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” (vv7-8)

John did not allow us to separate a religious righteousness from a life of righteousness. If we are made righteous by our faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22), it will be seen by our righteous lives. The most important thing a person can ever do is make sure he is righteous before God. This simply means he is held in right standing before God. It's more than saying, “not guilty.” It is more like saying, “Not guilty and in right standing.” It speaks of the presence of good, not just the absence of evil.

John is not saying that we are made righteous before God by our own righteous acts — the Bible clearly teaches that we are made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ — yet that righteousness in Jesus will be evident in our lives. We can live lives characterized by righteousness, not sin, because we have been given the righteousness of Jesus, and He is righteous. We have the resource we need to live righteously!

Born Again Christians Can't Sin. Huh?

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” (v9)

People who are settled in habitual sin are not the children of God — they are of the devil, and Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and free us from our bondage to the devil. John gave us one reason why Jesus came in 1 John 3:5 (He was manifested to take away our sins). Now, John gives us another reason: that He might destroy the works of the devil.

- We can just imagine the heart of God grieving over the destruction the devil has wrought over this earth and grieving that man has allowed the devil to do it all. Jesus came to put a stop to all that by overcoming the devil completely by His life, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection.
- Note the purpose of Jesus: to destroy the works of the devil. Not to neutralize them, not to alleviate them, or not to limit them. Jesus wants to destroy the works of the devil!
- Many people are unnecessarily afraid of the devil, fearing what he could do against them. If they only knew that as we walk in Jesus, the devil is afraid of us! As we walk in Jesus, we help in seeing Him destroy the works of the devil!

The change from being of the devil to being children of God comes as we are born of God; when this happens, our old nature, patterned after the instinctive rebellion of Adam, dies — and we are given a new nature, patterned after the instinctive obedience of Jesus Christ.

God's Seed in Us

"Seed" is sperma (from which we get our word "sperm"), used of the "seed of plants," and "male seed or semen." Here it refers to, "genetic character, nature, disposition, character" of the divine sperma. We know, of course, that God does not have a human body, but is Spirit (John 4:24); both male and female humans are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27).

What is "God's seed" then? Sometimes "seed" is used as a collective noun to refer to "offspring" (for example, Luke 1:55; John 8:33; Galatians 3:29). Probably following Jesus' use of seed as "the message of the kingdom" in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:11), Peter uses the "seed" to refer to the Word of God that brings about our new birth:

"Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." (1 Peter 1:23)

But symbols aren't always consistent in the Bible. In verse 9, I don't think that John has in mind "the word," the message, but the Holy Spirit as the seed.

"Does not sin" and "cannot sin" each has the same verb tense as does not sin in 1 John 3:6, meaning a continual practice of habitual sin. John tells us that when we are born again — born into the family of God — there is a real change in our relation to sin.

Righteous Conduct and Love for the Brethren.

"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." (v10)

John has already introduced the idea of being a child of God (1 John 3:1, that we should be called the children of God and 1 John 3:9, born of God). He has already written of some being of the devil (1 John 3:8). But here, he makes it plain: some are children of God, and some are children of the devil.

John doesn't spend time trying to prove or explain the existence of the devil. He knows the reality of the devil is a Biblical fact. Some today lack John's wisdom and either deny the devil's existence or they are obsessed with the devil.

Some might think John is far too harsh in saying some are children of the devil, supposing perhaps that John did not love people as Jesus did. But Jesus called people children of the devil also in John 8:41-45. In this passage, Jesus' point was important, establishing the principle that our spiritual parentage determines our nature and our destiny. If we are born again, and have God as our Father, it will show in our nature and destiny. But whether our father is Satan or Adam, it will also show in our nature and destiny — just as it showed in these adversaries of Jesus.

John gave a simple — though not easy — way to identify who the children of God and the children of the devil are. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

- Both are essential. Righteousness without love makes one a religious Pharisee, and love without righteousness makes one a partner in evil.
- How do righteousness and love "balance"? They don't. We are never to love at the expense of righteousness and are never to be righteous at the expense of love. We aren't looking for a

balance between the two, because they are not opposites. Real love is the greatest righteousness, and real righteousness is the greatest love.

- Love and righteousness are each most perfectly displayed in the nature of Jesus. He was both righteous, and completely loving.

Loving One Another.

“For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another...” (v11)

John had already emphasized the command to love as being the word which you heard from the beginning (1 John 2:7). In remembering this message to love one another, he remembered the command of Jesus in John 13:34. The basic Christian message has not changed. Perhaps some have thought that because Christians talk about a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ” that it is only us and Jesus who matter. But how we treat others — how we love one another — really matters before God.

Hated Because of Righteousness

“Not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brothers’ righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.” (vv12-13)

As a negative example, John presents Cain, who was not right with God (his works were evil) and who hated his brother. When there are two children of God who are both right with God, there will be love.

Cain is a good example of the failure to love.

- We can presume that Cain had a godly upbringing that should have equipped him to love, but he chose not to.
- Cain’s disobedience came from a lack of faith (Hebrews 11:4) which resulted in first disobedience, then hatred.
- Cain’s disobedience and hatred was based in pride (Genesis 4:5).
- Cain’s disobedience and hatred made him miserable (Genesis 4:5).
- Cain refused the warning God gave him and gave into the sin of hatred (Genesis 4:6-7).
- Cain’s sin of hatred led to action against the one he hated (Genesis 4:8).
- Cain was evasive about his sin of hatred and tried to hide it. But God found him out (Genesis 4:9-10).

Passed from Death to Life

“Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” (vv13-14)

We shouldn’t be surprised when the world hates us; but we should be surprised when there is hatred among the body of Christ. A love for the people of God is a basic sign of being born again. If this love is not evident in our lives, our salvation can be questioned. If it is present, it gives us assurance. We can know we have passed from death to life by our love for other Christians. The place of hatred, of jealousy, of bitterness you find yourself in is a place of death. You need to pass from death over to life.

This means knowing two things. First, we know that we were dead. Second, we know that we have passed to life from death. To pass from death to life is the reverse of the normal. We all expect to pass from life to death; but in Jesus, we can turn it around.

If we love the brethren, we will want to be with them — and even if we have been battered and bruised by unloving brethren, there will still be something in us drawing us back to fellowship with the brethren we love.

Murderer!

“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”
(v15)

To hate our brother is to murder him in our hearts. Though we may not carry out the action (through cowardice or fear of punishment), we wish that person dead. Or, by ignoring another person, we may treat them as if they were dead. Hatred can be shown passively or actively. John seemed to have in mind the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount regarding the true fulfilment of the law (Matthew 5:21-22).

To live in the practice of murder — or to have a lifestyle of the habitual hatred of our brethren — is a demonstration that we do not have eternal life abiding in us, that we are not born again. There are many people for whom being a Christian is a “none of the above” sort of thing. They consider themselves Christians because they are not Muslim, or Jewish, or Buddhists, or atheists. But being a Christian is never a “none of the above” kind of thing.

Being a Christian is more than saying, “I am a Christian.” There are in fact some who claim to be Christians who are not. How can we know if we are one of these? John’s reply has been constant and simple. There are three tests to measure the proof of a genuine Christian: the truth test, the love test, and the moral test. If we believe in what the Bible teaches as true, if we show the love of Jesus to others, and if our conduct has been changed and is becoming more like Jesus, then our claim to be a Christian can be proven true.