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Week Four

B. The life of love (3:11-24)

A person's spiritual nature is made evident externally by his habitual actions toward others. Genuine Christians love other Christians because love is a quality of the new birth common to all believers.

1. The principle of love (vv. 11-12)
Love for other Christians did not gradually develop into the

accepted practice of the early church. Rather, from the initial days of the church, the message to love the brethren was heard. Biblical love for fellow Christians was part of doing righteousness. It was obeying the Word of Christ as preached by the apostles (v. 11).

This love was not typical human love. Such love is often fickle. For example, Cain for years gave appearance of loving his brother Abel, yet, he slaughtered him. The occasion for Cain's actions was the rejection of his disobedient offering to God. When God accepted Abel's offering, Cain furthered his sin by showing no love to his own brother. By these two actions, Cain demonstrated that he was not a child of God (v. 12).

2. The practice of love (vv. 13-15)

It is not possible for Christians to receive the love written about by John from those of this world system. The world system propagates an absence of love ("hatred"). Such an ungodly response is normal among the unsaved, but it is not normal from Christians (v. 13).

A personal realization of a change from this world's system to the life of God is made possible by habitual love for the brethren. Literally, John writes of a "migration" having taken place by believers "out of death" and "into life." The assurance that this is true comes from loving the brethren. Anyone who does not love his brother is remaining in spiritual death. Love becomes an infallible evidence that one has made the passage from spiritual death to life (v. 14).

John adds that one who hates ("has an absence of love") his brother, is a man-slayer (Matt. 5:21-22). Hate is merely one expression of murder. Such life stealers cannot be possessors of the life of God. The evidence is clear. The habitual practice of love for the brethren comes from one who is a son of God. Those having an absence of love indicate that they are spiritually dead (v. 15).

3. The example of love (vv. 16-18)

Lest there be a question as to the meaning of love, John writes that Christ's love at Calvary is the model of Biblical love. By means of His love, believers come to know real love. Christ laid down His life for the benefit of others. He had a selfless concern for the well-being of others. His actions depict love as a "deliberate, voluntary, self-sacrifice on behalf of others." Christ's love for believers placed an obligation upon each believer. "To lay down one's life for another" believer is the ideal set forth (v. 16). In a practical way, John describes the giving of possessions to another Christian in need of daily necessities as an act of love. Christian love is never for self but for others. Therefore, sonship, which brings genuine love for the brethren, is testable (v. 17).

Believers cannot be content to love with their mouth. True love is seen by godly action. This action will follow the teaching of vv. 10-17 (v. 18).

4. The assurance from love (vv. 19-24)

John again returns to his favorite expression, "we know," since he writes about personal assurance of salvation. An habitual love for other believers brings certain knowledge of the truth of salvation and a confidence of heart before the Lord. John writes about personal peace of heart even though being examined by God (v. 19). However, if the professing believer's heart is condemning him, there can be no assurance. God is more knowledgeable and more demanding than the human heart. When the heart gives no assurance, the "believer" should not expect God to overlook the message of the heart (v. 20). To not have love for the brethren is an indication that there is no salvation in one's life. However, if the heart does not bring condemnation, the believer, being a genuine son, has boldness with the Father. This boldness ("confidence") with God is the result of being a son of God (v. 21).

As a result of this sonship and boldness with God, a believer may petition God limitlessly. For the Christian who comes to God with real love for others and in obedience to God's Word, there will be godly direction in the praying. Houses, lands, gold and silver will not be the content of prayer (v. 22).

John so desired that these Christians have the assurance of their salvation that he summarized what sonship includes. A son must personally place his confidence ("believe") in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ. This requires not only an acknowledgement that He existed, but that everything said about Him is true. By this confession comes spiritual birth and its external evidence of love for all other Christians. This love requires a sacrificial action on behalf of others just as God gave commandment (v. 23). Biblical love can only be measured accurately by conformity to God's command.

Those who keep these commands of God are obviously abiding in Christ and Christ is in them. No unsaved person can fulfill the practices of God's children. The lost man hates the brethren (v. 13). By seeing the truth of this chapter, the Christian has assurance ("knows") that he belongs to God. The proof of this belonging comes from the Holy Spirit who comes into the believer at salvation (v. 24).

CONCLUSION:

As John began chapter three, he altered his emphasis from sharing the life of God to being a son of God. Sonship is a present reality because of a past spiritual birth. Someday, it will entail a Christ-likeness for every believer. This life of being a son of God (sonship) involves a correct behavior before God. No child of God can habitually live in disobedience to God (vv. 4-10). The basic reason for this truth is the indwelling Holy Spirit whose presence prohibits habitual living in rebellion against God (vv. 9-10).

The new believer's attitude and actions toward other children of God change from the absence of love ("hate") to love. This love was exemplified by Christ's death. The true believer will habitually give himself for the needs of other Christians (vv. 11-18). By this sacrifice, the believer knows that a spiritual change has taken place. His own heart and the Holy Spirit will concur this is true or they will condemn him because it is not. Thus, the believer is given another test to bring to him assurance of his salvation.