

## **THE TEST CONTINUES: IT'S ONE OR THE OTHER**

### **1 John 2:9-11**

As we begin considering the next three verses, I feel setting forth a word of caution may be both appropriate and helpful. If not for you, it will be for me. I'm pretty sure the enemy would like to get an advantage on us as we examine ourselves as to our love for the brethren. So, let's be cautious as to who's voice we listen to.

As always, John uses plain language. What he says is, for the most part, is easily understood. Although it is plain it doesn't mean it is shallow. Actually, the subject John is setting forth here demands we look with honesty at our heart.

**Verse 9** begins with a phrase we have seen before: "He that saith..." Man can say anything he chooses, but remember, the proof is in the pudding. Anyone can say they are "in the light" but if that person "hateth his brother, (he) is in darkness even until now."

In **1 John 4:20** the Apostle will revisit this subject. It is as if there he writes a compact commentary in order to be clearly understood. He wants us to know what he means. The Bible does this throughout. Actually, the Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. The verse reads like this: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar (now this is not the first time we've heard John say that is it?): for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen." The unspoken, but all too obvious conclusion here is, it is impossible to do so.

Now, how are to understand this statement, especially in light of the fact some of our Christian brothers and sisters are difficult to love? In fact, I'm sure some of our brothers and sisters think the same way about us! Imagine that! The first thing I think we need to be here is to be honest. **Love is not blind!** Just because we see things in others professing to be a brother or sister in Christ that we don't like doesn't mean we cannot love them. Love is a choice. Love is a characteristic of the indwelling Holy Spirit that resides in our hearts. Love is, actually, a command.

"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light and there is none occasion of stumbling in him." **verse 10** says. If love is honest, and not blind as I suggested

above, it means we can see the imperfections in others as they see them in us, and we can still love another. Love is a lot of things but love is not blind.

Maybe the best example of this idea can be seen in one of my favorite Bible stories. It is found in **Mark 10:17-22**. The story is about a rich young ruler that came “running” to Jesus wanting to know what he must do in order to “inherit eternal life.” As we watch the scene unfold in this passage, we are told something rather amazing. In **verse 21** Mark says (about Jesus) “Then Jesus beholding him (the rich young ruler) *loved him*, (emphasis mine) and said unto him, One thing thou lackest:...”

Wow! Isn't that amazing! Jesus loved this young man enough to be honest with him. He loved him enough to tell him the truth. That is not an easy thing to do **ESPECIALLY** knowing what Jesus knew this young man would do. He knew that this, seemingly, eager young man who came to the right person, asking the right question, in the right manner would actually go away sorrowful after hearing the truth. If I understand this passage correctly, this interchange between Jesus and the young ruler had eternal consequences.

What am I suggesting? Simply this, walking in the light is not always easy. It requires honesty. It, at time, results in pain. But none of those things are to be the result of a lack of love in our heart!

In this life we will meet people we desire to be close to and there are others we will meet that we will be fine in knowing them only in a casual way; at a distance. In fact, if we are honest, we will meet some people we are happy to keep as much distance from as possible.

***BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE CANNOT OR DO NOT LOVE THEM!***

Remember in **Genesis 13** following the return of Abraham and his clan from their sojourn in Egypt back into the promise land the rift that arose between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of his nephew Lot? Do you remember what Abraham suggested to Lot as a solution for the problem that had arisen? It was simply to put distance between the two of them. Abraham suggested Lot choose the direction he wanted to go and the place he wanted to dwell assuring Lot he would go in the opposite direction. I believe the motivating factor behind this

whole thing was love! After all, didn't Abraham say, "we be brethren" (**Genesis 13:8**)?

You may be thinking how can I say this? Well, if we continue reading the account of Abraham and Lot we will find at least two ways Abraham manifested his love for his nephew in two amazing and different situations.

We find the first display of his love for Lot recorded in **Genesis 14** when, after hearing of Lot being taken captive by invading kings, Abraham did what was necessary to deliver his nephew whom he loved even at the risk of his own life and well being. Although he and Lot had decided to put distance between each other physically, they knew that distance would have no negative effect on them relationally. Abraham's love for Lot after they had separated was as great as for him as it was when his brother Haran (**Genesis 11:31**) died early in life leaving Lot fatherless.

The second display of Abraham's love for Lot can be seen in what he did in attempting to rescue him from destruction in Sodom and Gomorrah as recorded in **Genesis 18**. And he did it at a distance! When Abraham saw the Lord in what is known as a Christophany (that is a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ on planet Earth) on the plain of Mamre, he proved, in the actions he took, that he was anxious to fellowship Lord and to learn of the reason for His presence.

After entertaining the Lord and His accompanying angels (whose names were Justice and Judgment) and knowing our Lord was ready, Himself to continue his journey, Abraham did something, I believe, rather amazing. He intentionally got in the way of the Lord who was headed for Sodom and Gomorrah for "a look see" for Himself about the condition of those cities of the plain. Do you know what moved Abraham to get in the Lord's way in the way he did? The answer is simple. It was his love of and fear for his nephew Lot that he had in his heart.

Abraham full well knew the choices Lot had made. And, I cannot help but believe he knew something of the life-style that was prevalent in those cities. I cannot help but believe he had, on occasion, offered up sacrifice on the behalf of Lot as did Job for his sons and daughters peradventure they had sinned. Love in the heart will move a person to do such things.

So, I believe we can legitimately love someone at distance if we cannot love them up close. In fact, Paul taught the Romans in **Romans 12:18** “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” I take the inference here to mean that, if we can’t live with someone close by then put whatever distance is necessary between you and them in order to ensure peace with them is possible.

But let’s face the truth we have before us here. The test John sets forth manifests truth about ourselves whether we like it or not. If we want to know for sure if we are a child of God all we have to do is just ask ourselves if we love or hate our brother in the Lord! John is clear on this issue. He says, if you hate your brother you are in darkness and not light regardless of what you may say. It is impossible to exist in both the realm of love and hate at the same time. That’s the bad news. The good news is if you are loving your brother, you can rest assured you are walking in the light.

May I ask you a question? Whom do we injure the most when we possess an unloving spirit towards someone? Is it the person for which we hold such a spirit or do we injure our self more by harboring such a spirit? I think you full well know the answer to that.

“He that saith” says John. It is easy to practice a “Christianity” of words. But when we do, the result is an undeniable emptiness in the pit of our stomach that will not go away. It will not go away by singing the right words to songs, praying a well rehearsed prayer in public, or by using the right kind of words in the right situation. Such actions cannot change the fact we are only deceiving ourselves. The only way for that emptiness to go away is to love as we should and, by the grace of God, can.

Although I will not quote verbatim from the work Warren Wiersbe has done on **1 John** I will borrow his line of thinking which sets, in an amazingly clear manner, the truth about someone who says he loves the brother but actually hates the brother and who thinks he is walking in the light when in reality he his walking in darkness.

A love that does not show itself in action is not the kind of love a Christian is commanded to have. It is not the kind of love with which God loves us. When a professed believer does not love another brother he is walking in darkness when he thinks he is walking in light. In **Matthew 6:22-23** says something rather

remarkable. It reads as follows: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in the be darkness, ow great is that darkness?”

Jesus is saying there is it possible for a person to think they are in the light when in reality they are in darkness. When that happens, and it does I’m afraid too often, the darkness is actually worse than imagined. When we think we see when in reality we do not then the blindness is at a maximum level, sad to say.

In his commentary, Dr. Wiersbe continues with his thoughts by saying that kind of person “lives in the darkness though he probably thinks he is living in the light. He thinks he sees, but he is actually blinded by the darkness of hatred. This is the kind of person who causes trouble in Christian groups. He thinks he is a “spiritual giant,” with great understanding, when in actuality he is a babe with very little spiritual perception. He may read his Bible faithfully and pray fervently, but if he has hatred in his heart, he is living a lie.” How sad!

I believe what I have just said is commentary enough on **verse 11** which reads “But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

For John, there is not middle of the road. The proof is in the pudding, as we have already seen. It is either light or darkness. It is either love or hate. It doesn’t matter what one may say, the truth is always found in the doing and not in the saying.

As we continue our journey in the Book of John we will run into this subject again as I have mentioned above.

I don’t know about you but this study has challenged me to look within, honestly. I readily confess that I need the Spirit to do the work in my heart I am not capable of doing on my own. But, I have also learned that if I walk in the light (which has to do with my being honest and open not seeking to hide anything), God’s Spirit will produce the kind of love in my heart that will enable me to keep the commandment the Spirit has set before me in this intimate family letter. After all, a healthy family, if we are honest with one another, honestly loves one another in spite of all its other shortcomings.

And, when we do that, we will experience the joy that’s sure to follow.

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