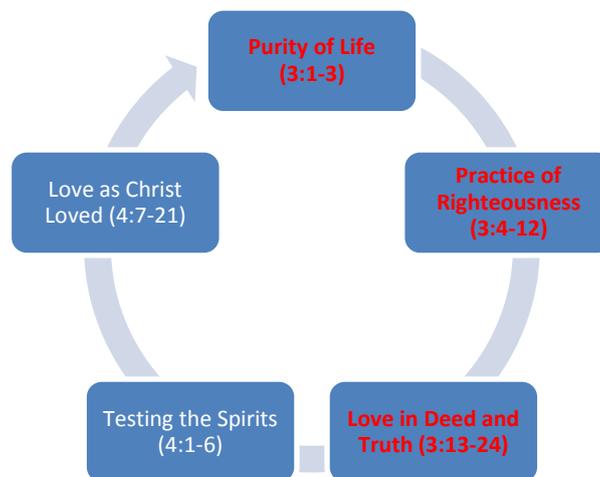


Life BPC Sunday School Adults' Class: Study of the First Epistle of John (Nov – Dec 2016)

Lesson 3: Characteristics of Fellowship (Part I) (1John 3:1-24)

Overview

Chapter 3 and 4 explained the 5 characteristics of fellowship. Characteristics are distinctive marks and qualities that belong to a person or an item. In this case, 5 identification marks were listed of true fellowship in the Lord. We will cover the first 3 in Chap 3 and next 2 in Chap 4.



The 5 Characteristics of Fellowship

Characteristic #1: Purity of Life (3:1-3)

v.1 started with behold to explain the amazing grace of how the love of God was bestowed (benevolence, unconditional love) upon us, in making us His children. As a result, there is a new identity and separation, the unbelieving world do not know what we believe in, what we now stand for – because it does not know God. Its ignorance of God that led to a general mistrust and misunderstanding of believers.

As the sons of God, we shall be like Him and see Him as He is at the Second Coming of Christ (v.2). This is a very important teaching as it is the hope in every believer. Those who bear this hope of seeing Christ face to face will purify him and pursue a life of purity i.e. contrast with 2:16.

Application

Purity is not pursued through physical isolation i.e. creation of the monastery. Purity is a result of faith and love in Christ, like the case of Augustine, cutting off ties from old friends. Living a life of purity is to be like Christ (v.3 ...as He is pure).

Characteristic #2: Practice of Righteousness (3:4-12)

Pursuing the purity of life must be coupled with another important practice – the practice of righteousness. WSC Qn 14 says that sin is the lack of conformity unto or the transgression of God's Law (v.4). Sin is like cancer, it will consume a soul and destroy the fellowship in the Lord. This is why John had to reiterate that believers cannot live in sin. Committing sin (v.4) is understood as being a) enslaved by sin, b) deliberately pursuing sin and c) continuing the course of sin. It is choosing sin as part of one's lifestyle. One who abides in Christ does not sin, if you choose to live in sin, you have not known Christ (v.6).

John spoke with authority in v.7 that believers are not to be deceived that it is fine for sin to co-live with righteousness. One must separate from sin. One who practice ('do') righteousness (behavior) is righteous (state), because he is righteous (condition). V.8 says to commit sin and to live in sin is of the devil, the devil sinneth from the beginning (Isa 14:12-13), and the works of the devil will be destroyed (3 references).

As a summary, those who are born-again does not practice (commit) sin, and cannot sin willfully as he is constrained by the love of God (2Cor 5:14). On the contrary, the children of the devil (unbelievers) does not practice righteousness, and does not love the people around them (v.10). Believers cannot behave like the unbelievers of the world e.g. Cain (v.12), but to love one another in the Lord!

Application

Pursuit of righteousness is demanded of us. It is a characteristic of true fellowship. It is a mark of being born-again. Story of practicing "Thou shall not steal" i.e. friend asking about credit bills from boutique. Story of asking for "extra bills" i.e. phone and laundry bills. Read Heb 6:10 & 12:14.

Characteristic #3: Love in Deed and Truth (3:13-24)

v.13 starts with a universal truth for the believers – the world hates you! Read John 15:18-19. We represent God and His godliness, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (John 3:19). Loving the brethren is a serious business. So far, John had reiterated it several times. It is an indication of our conversion and state in Christ. If you love the brethren, it shows you are born-again. If you hate the brethren, you abides in death, you are a murderer, you do not inherit eternal life (v.14-15).

Love of God is seen though Christ laying down His life. Love for God is seen by us laying down our lives for others (v.16). We are not to pursue after material goods, not to love in words only, but also to love others in deed and truth (v.17-18). We have the conviction of the Holy Spirit (v.21) that will move us to the truth and condemn our hearts if we sin. Read 1Thes 5:19 on quenching the Spirit and Eph 4:30 on grieving the Spirit.

In summing up chap 3, John said believers have a special access to God and the avenue to receive special blessings, because we keep His commandments and do that which are pleasing to Him (v.22). So what is the commandment? To believe in Christ and to love one another (v.23) – GE model, Glorify God and Edify man.

Application

Remember the account of Abraham's humility towards Lot, and his trust in God while loving his nephew in deed and truth. Acts 2:45 recorded the action of early Christians in selling material possessions to help others. What are the weightier matters of the law? Read Mt 23:23.

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