

An Exposition Of Brotherly Love

Introduction. Although the apostle Paul is certainly worthy of the appellation “the apostle of love” in view of his discourse in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, because of the many references to love in his writings (60 times), John has come to be known as “the apostle of love.”

In his first letter, John declared that love is evidence of abiding in the light or having fellowship with God (1 John 2:10; 1:5-7) and of being a child of God (1 John 3:10, 14). In the book, John also touched upon the definition of love (1 John 3:16) and the value of love (1 John 3:18-19). But now, in the passage which serves as the text for our study, John expounds upon the theme of brotherly love in much greater depth (1 John 4:7-21).

I. **Brotherly Love Is Evidence Of Being Born Of God**

- A. We should love one another, for love is of God.
 - 1. As will be illustrated shortly, true love (*agape*, “active goodwill”) emanates from God (1 John 4:7).
 - 2. That is because “God is love” (1 John 4:8). God defines love; it does not define Him.
 - a) Love here is not to be understood as one of God’s many activities; rather, every activity of His is loving activity.
 - b) Every action of His is motivated out of an “active goodwill” toward us.
 - c) This does not mean He overlooks sin, for God is also “light” (1 John 1:5-6).
- B. Those who love demonstrate that they are born of God.
 - 1. They “know God” (1 John 4:7). They are a true Christian. It is as important as righteous behavior (1 John 2:29).
 - 2. The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day knew a lot about God, but they did not really know Him (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 3:7).
 - 3. But if one does not love as God does, then they have not yet come to truly know God (1 John 4:8). If love does not reign in the heart, you cannot pretend to be like God.

II. **Brotherly Love Is Defined By God’s Love**

- A. God manifested His love through the gift of His Son.
 - 1. John makes it clear that the love he speaks of involves concrete action. God sent His “only begotten Son” (1 John 4:9; John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18).
 - 2. He sent His Son for two reasons.
 - a) That we might live (abundantly) through Him (1 John 4:9; John 10:10).

- (1) Death is our present condition (cf. 1 John 3:14).
- (2) God intended that we might find life in Him so that we might live in love as He works in and through us.
- b) That He might be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10).
- B. This is the kind of love we should have.
 - 1. This is the kind of love God had toward us.
 - a) I.e., active goodwill toward others (1 John 4:10).
 - (1) God's love for us defines what true love requires -- the commitment to sacrifice one's most beloved possession for another's gain.
 - (2) So for God, love required that He send His Son as an atoning sacrifice for us.
 - b) I.e., manifested to all, even enemies (1 Timothy 2:5-6; Romans 5:6-8).
 - 2. God's love in us requires deeds by which we show our love for one another. Just as God's children must be holy because He is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:15-16) and merciful because He is merciful (Genesis 19:16; Luke 6:36), so they must love because He loves (cf. Matthew 7:16, 20; 1 John 3:18).

III. **Brotherly Love Is Evidence Of God Dwelling In Us**

- A. Through brotherly love, God's abiding is possible.
 - 1. No one has seen God at any time (1 John 4:12; John 1:18).
However, when we keep the command to love one another, God will abide in us, and His love will be perfected (fulfilled, finished) in us (1 John 4:12; 3:24).
 - a) This does not mean we are perfect, but going beyond what would naturally take place points us toward the perfection of God (Matthew 5:48).
 - b) As God was once present in His Son, so now He is present through the faithful. Love to each other is the proper way to show our love to God.
 - 2. We know this is true because of the Spirit which God has given (1 John 4:13; 3:24).
 - a) The Spirit was to remind the apostles of all that Jesus taught (John 14:26).
 - (1) There are no visible, physical signs of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8). When someone has been born again, we see the change, not the Spirit.
 - (2) Although "no one has seen God" at any time, we do "see" by faith that the cross of Christ was for our sins and for our salvation.

- (3) We do "see" in Jesus our Savior and Lord. We do "see" in the fellowship of faith the presence of His love (Romans 5:5).
- b) This included Jesus' teaching on how the Father and the Son would abide in them; i.e., through keeping the commandments (John 14:21, 23).
- B. Because the Holy Spirit gives us this "seeing" experience, we are commissioned to bear witness to the event.
1. The apostles testified that the Father sent the Son to be our Savior (1 John 4:14). Therefore we must be willing to confess Jesus as the Son of God (1 John 4:15).
 2. We know and rely on the fact that God loves us. We then come to realize through relying on His love that in His very nature God is love. We finally discover that to live in God means to live in love. Thus the fellowship we have with the Father and the Son is a fellowship of love (1 John 4:16; cf. John 6:69; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

IV. ***Brotherly Love Provides Assurance***

- A. When brotherly love is perfected, we can have boldness.
1. Failure to love means disobeying Jesus and spurning the Father's love in sending Jesus. To live in love, however, is to live in God, and this results in complete confidence in the day of judgment (1 John 4:17).
 2. Just as Jesus "abides" in the love of the Father (cf. John 15:10), an abiding that already marked His earthly existence and gave Him "boldness" before God, so "in this world" we also may abide in the Father's love and share in that same boldness.
- B. As brotherly love is perfected, fear is dispelled.
1. Love and fear are incompatible. Prospects of torment naturally produce fear (Mark 9:44, 48). The more we grow in God's love, to a degree, the more fear is dispersed. If we fear judgment, that is an indication that something is amiss (1 John 4:18). All saints should love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8; James 1:12).
 2. The fear spoken of here is not to be confused with reverence for God. Reverence will only deepen when we experience God's love. It should make us even more obedient to His commands.

V. ***Brotherly Love Is Essential To Loving God***

- A. The confidence we have in knowing that God loves us delivers us from fear but not from responsible action. In fact, God's love for us and in us sets us free to love the saints even as God loves them. To claim to love God and still hate one's brother is a lie.

1. Like those who claim:
 - a) To have fellowship with God while they walk in darkness (1 John 1:6).
 - b) To not have sinned (1 John 1:10).
 - c) To know Jesus while not keeping His commandments (1 John 2:4).
 - d) To claim the Father while denying His Son (1 John 2:22-23).
 - e) To love God while hating his brother (1 John 4:20).
 2. To love one whom we cannot see requires that we first be able to love those whom we can see (1 John 4:20).
- B. To love God, therefore, means we must develop brotherly love.
1. Brotherly love seeks nothing in return. Instead, it forgives (Matthew 18:21-22), bears burdens (Galatians 6:2), and sacrifices to meet needs (Philippians 2:3-4).
 2. Those who love God cannot refuse to love the image of God that meets them in their neighbor; they are inseparable (John 13:34-35; Matthew 22:35-40).

Conclusion. If "brotherly love" is the evidence of being born of God, is defined by God's love for us, is evidence of fellowship with God, is a means of providing assurance in the day of judgment, and is essential to loving God, then how dare we neglect this commandment? While there are other commands of our Lord that we must be careful to obey, none is so important, so essential to our spiritual life as God's children, as this one (John 15:12). Are we letting the love that God displayed toward us through His Son Jesus teach us how to love one another?