



Lesson 6 – We Should Love One Another

1 John 3:11-24

It's hard to overstate the importance of love for John, or for that matter the importance of love for Christianity as a whole. John describes love as "that which you heard from the beginning." He then goes on in this passage by saying love is how we know we have passed from death to life and that love of the brothers is the great summation of God's commands. Throughout chapters 3 and four of this letter, John is going come back over and over to the importance of love (36 times!).

Should Christians love unbelievers? If so, why does John specify that we ought to love "one another" instead of simply saying that we should love everyone?

Too often love is a Christian theme we hear about so often we become apathetic to its importance. Many Christians have grown up hearing the call to love others so often that passages like 1 John 3 don't really grab our attention anymore. But the language that John uses here is startling if we study it carefully and let it simply say what it is saying.

Read 1 John 3:11-24 as a group. Let the group know at the beginning that you will be asking for a one sentence summary of the passage once you have read it together, and then try to summarize as best as possible after you get several responses.

I. Love is the distinguishing mark of the believer (3:11-18)

John is once again very blunt as he starts this section. The message that these believers had heard from their first exposure to the gospel was that Christians should love one another. As we saw last week that love should distinguish who is a child of God from who is a child of Satan. In this lesson we will see John continue his discussion of the importance of love by this time comparing those who are of the world with those who have passed from death to life.

A. The world is characterized by hatred (3:11-13).

Those who are of the world are under the control of Satan, like Cain was. Cain was the first person to follow in the murderous, lying path of his spiritual father Satan. As such, Cain functions as a picture of the world, which is comprised of all those who are under the power and influence of Satan (cf Ephesians 2:2).

What about the nice unbeliever, the person who is doing their best to be a kind and respectful neighbor or family member? Is it really fair to say that such a person is under the control of Satan?

Although Cain was not physically descended from Satan, he was the spiritual son of the devil because he lived as Satan would want him to live – lying and killing. Jesus said something similar when he was arguing with the Jews in the gospel of John. In fact, he outright accused them of being just like their father, the devil (cf John 8:44). In this instance of the hatred of the Jews for Jesus were the result of their following the path of their father. Jesus would later say that if they hated the Master, they would certainly hate His servants (John 15:18-21). The

world's hatred will be directed at Christians. This should not surprise believers or cause them to despair, but rather realize that this is exactly what we signed up for when we decided to follow Jesus.

How is it that the hatred of the world is demonstrated toward Christians today?

What does it mean that Christians will be hated by the world? What about godly Christians who have great success and influence?

How should Christians respond when they are hated by the world?

B. The believer is characterized by love (3:14-18).

Drawing on the stark contrast he set up earlier in the chapter, John compares the hatred that the world has to the love that Christians have. One way that we know we have been truly born again is by our love, a love that moves us to act just as it moved God to act.

1. Love demonstrates our conversion (3:14-15).

Throughout the gospel of John we will frequently see the phrase “by this we know” or some variation (2:3, 5; 3:14, 16, 19, 24; 4:2, 6, 13). These phrases normally give a test, something that should be true in our life, and what that test proves, normally different ways to express the general idea of salvation. In 1 John 3:14 the author states that we know that we have passed from death to life by our love for one another. Once again, John is being uncomfortably blunt. Those who have been given

new life, the life of Christ, who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who have been given a new nature, are going to love the brothers.

This does not mean that they will do this perfectly, but it does mean that they will have something to show. As we saw last week, God's children tend to act like him and Satan's children tend to act like him. If we have truly been saved, it will show up in the way that we love other Christians.

Why do you think it matters so much to God that Christians love other Christians? Why do we sometimes struggle to do this?

What do you think it looks like to love other Christians?

2. Love is demonstrated by our actions (3:16-18).

So what does it mean to love other believers? It's one thing to say "Christians ought to love other Christians." But the word love is used in so many different ways that it can be downright confusing. Someone can love pizza, their job, their kids, or their spouse; and love means something different in every one of those contexts. Not only that, but people also show love differently. Some wear their emotions on their sleeve, others tend to be quiet. Some go out of their way to do acts of kindness, others think that love looks like spending time with someone.

John helps us understand what he thinks of by love. While warm feelings and kind words should be at

least part of the equation, for John love is defined by action. Specifically, John has in mind meeting the needs of another. This love was first demonstrated by God on our behalf when he paid the ultimate price that we could never pay, and as his children we are now expected to reflect our Father by acting in merciful and compassionate ways.

How specifically did John envision this help being carried out? (cf James 2:15-16)

What are some ways that we as believers can seek to help meet the needs of others today?

Remember, John wrote this passage to be a challenge but also to be an encouragement! His goal was not that the whole church walk away feeling like a failure, but rather he wanted to give some standards so that they could know where they stood. The goal here is not total and complete perfection, because there will always be room for growth (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10). In fact, those who are living with a supernatural love for other Christians will find greater confidence in their spiritual life, as John goes on to observe...

II. Love brings confidence to the believer (3:19-24)

This passage includes the phrase “by this we know” two more times, once in the beginning and once at the end. It returns to the concept of confidence that started off last week’s lesson (2:29). John wants to answer how we can have this confident knowledge: by keeping God’s command to love.

A. Our confidence before God: loving others (3:19-20).

What do we do when our hearts are plagued by doubt? That is an old question that many believers have faced. John starts off verse 19 with the phrase “hereby we know that we are of the truth.” The question is, what does John mean by “hereby”?¹

It can be a great confidence to the believer to look at their life and to realize that God is at work and that, although not perfectly, they are keeping God’s command to love others. When someone is able to look at their life and recognize what can only be described as the work of God in their hearts, it gives them confidence that they truly have been born again and are now part of God’s family.

We are often nervous to state that we should look to our behavior as proof that we are saved. Why do you think that is? Are we right in doing so? What else does Scripture have to say about faith, salvation, and works?

The next phrases are challenging, but what John seems to be saying is that as we look at our behavior we find ourselves sometimes burdened that we aren’t doing enough, or that what we are doing is done from wrong

¹ This section is challenging, a fact which most commentators readily admit. The problems are somewhat related to the Greek grammar, but even more to related to trying to figure out what exactly John means. The phrase “by this we know” (here translated “hereby”) is normally completed afterwards with a phrase that starts with “that” or “because.” But the phrases that follow don’t seem to fit well with this typical pattern. This study will understand “hereby [by this]” in verse 19 to refer back to the keeping of the command to love, not looking forward to the fact of our heart’s condemnation or the fact that God is greater than our hearts.

motives. In those instances, it is important to remember that we are forgiven and empowered by God, and he is the one who will ultimately judge us. Keeping a balance between looking for fruit in keeping with our confession and trusting the ultimate judgment of the God who sees all and knows all is an important job for the believer. When we've done our best, and know that it is faulty and stained with sin, we can rest in the fact that our relationship with God doesn't rest on our judgment, it rests on God's.

How might this be an encouragement to someone who is burdened by guilt? What should a person do if they feel so paralyzed by guilt that they don't feel like they can move forward?

B. Our confidence before God: keeping God's commands (3:21-24)

Fear and worry and a burdened conscience don't need to be the experience of believers. God wants us to be in a place of confidence, where we have dealt with every known sin and are seeking to live righteously before God (cf Acts 24:16). This happens as we live lives that keep his commandments. Obviously, no one will perfectly keep every command in Scripture, but by the power of God and with the help of the Spirit we can live in such a way that we are as a general principle obeying God. When we do that, we are emboldened in our prayer lives, we are abiding in God, and we are given confidence that he is abiding in us.

God's command to us from the beginning of the gospel has been to love as Christ loved. It's an old command to us by now, although it was a command that was new in quality when Christ gave it. Loving other believers should be the distinguishing characteristic of the child of God, because the one who loves God ought to love the people God has a special relationship with. When we live this way, obeying God by believing in him and loving the brothers, we find a boldness and a confidence that assures us that we are God's children and empowers us in prayer. "We should... love one another" John reminds us. It really is hard to overstate how important this simple, basic command is for the believer in Christ.

What should someone do if they feel disconnected from other believers? How does one "grow in love" (cf 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)?

What if someone finds they generally dislike being around other Christians, and can't really point to a time in recent memory when they felt concern for the spiritual and physical needs of another believer?