

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
April 12, 2015

Lesson Text: 1 John 3:11-24
Lesson Title: Love One Another

Introduction

There are several unique truths about the First Epistle of John. First, while it is commonly agreed among Bible scholars that the Apostle John was the author of this book, 1 John, along with Hebrews, is one of only two New Testament epistles that do not identify their authors. John's authorship is supported by both internal and external evidence, part of which is that the author of this book claims to have been an eyewitness to the events in Christ's life (1 John 1:1-4). That truth alone narrows the field of possible authors in favor of the Apostle John. Second, 1 John is not written to an individual or a specific church like other epistles. It has no traditional introduction that tells us who is writing to whom. It also has no personal greeting or closing words. Third, there are no personal names in this epistle which is also different from most other epistles. But as the reader will see from the opening words, this epistle is much more than a general commentary on the Christian life.

While these unique truths are interesting to think about, there are also some obvious truths about 1 John. First, it is obvious that this epistle was written to believers and that there was a personal and pastoral relationship between the author and his readers. John speaks about "*we*" (1 John 1:1-3) and "*your*" (1 John 1:4) and references those to whom he writes as "*my little children*" (1 John 2:1); "*brethren*" (1 John 2:7) and "*beloved*" (1 John 3:2; 4:1, 7, 11). This is without question a family epistle. Second, the recipients of this letter were in much need of the truth and instruction presented. Most likely this letter was read by several churches in Asia Minor that were at this particular time in church history under severe attack from false teachers who wanted to introduce heresy into the church.

First John calls the family of God together around the basic fundamentals of obedience, truth, and love. Loving one another is one of the many tests as to how we can know that we are Christians. Love in the Christian life is not optional. John first mentions love in this epistle in 1 John 2:5-11. John declares that what he is writing is not new, for it is part of the old commandment. Then, with almost the same stroke of the pen, he talks about love as being the "*new commandment*" (1 John 2:8). Obviously John was speaking of "*new*" in the sense of enlarging the concept of love.

The false teachers and heretics of John's day boasted of their relationship with God and their knowledge of the truth, but they had no love for the believers. John says that one who hates his brother is still in spiritual darkness (1 John 3:10). Hate is one of the characteristics possessed by those who have never experienced the saving love of Jesus Christ. It's simple, you cannot keep on hating people and claim to be a part of Christ's kingdom. John now makes that truth more personal by describing what happens when we fail to love one another.

Unbelievers and Love (1 John 3:11-17)

Verse 11

"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

As John addresses the issue of love again with his readers, he writes, "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." Although the false teachers had introduced the first century believers to heresy about sin, righteousness, obedience, and love, John reminds them that they knew the truth "from the beginning." "From the beginning" is speaking about the gospel truth that was preached to them by the apostles at the very start of the Christian message. The false teachers were teaching that love is not a part of being a Christian. John wants his readers to go back to the "beginning" and remember that the Christian message has always been about "loving one another" (1 John 2:24).

Note: There is a lot of truth in the saying, "If it's new, it ain't true!" That doesn't mean God doesn't give new insight into truth but it means when you hear someone tell you they have a new truth or new revelation, watch out! That's what the cults do. They profess to have a new revelation that no one else has ever heard or seen. The same is true in the health and wealth gospel. These self-made preachers and teachers have a new word about success or an extra-biblical revelation. Doctor Vance Havner once said, "We don't need something new. What we need is something so old people would think it is new!" That's what John wanted his readers to do. Go back to the "beginning!"

Verse 12

"Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

"Not as Cain" signifies that John is introducing a contrasting example to what a true Christian should be in relation to love. John's contrast is simple. Those who follow the devil or "that wicked one" hate and those who follow Christ love.

His example is “Cain.” “Cain,” was the son of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4:1) and had a brother named Abel (Genesis 4:2). He “slew” or murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). The word “slew” means, “to cut the throat.” No doubt Abel had witnessed his parents slay animals for sacrifice to God and he used that same method on his brother. His murder of his brother and the method he used was an insult to Almighty God.

“Cain, was of that wicked one.” The word “wicked” means “evil in active opposition to good.” That means Cain belonged to the devil. He was Satan’s child. His life was under the dominion of Satan. Cain’s life is what life is like for children of the “wicked one.”

Why did Cain kill Abel? John says, “Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (Genesis 4:3-5). “Abel” is described as “righteous” in two New Testament references (Matthew 23:35; Hebrews 11:4). God had given clear instruction as to how to worship Him. Cain and Abel knew what God required. Cain rejected God’s way and decided to do it his own way by bringing God a bloodless offering of the fruit of the ground (Genesis 4:3-5). Then in an act of defiance manifesting that he was a child of the devil, he basically said, “Okay, God, You want a sacrifice? Here’s one.” And he gave to God “righteous Abel.” Cain had the opportunity of obedience, but instead of following the example of his father Adam, he followed his father Satan and he killed his brother.

Verse 13

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.”

“Marvel not” means “don’t be surprised.” The unbelieving world not only take life as in the case of Cain killing Abel, they also hate life. Not all unbelievers commit acts of murder like Cain, but they have the attitude that could do such deeds. John wants his readers to know that God’s children are hated by the devil’s children. People who are dead in trespasses and sin do not have the ability to love.

John is not saying that every unbeliever hates you and wants to kill you. But John is saying that the general pattern of godless people is murder and hatred of life. Murder is fueled by the wicked system of Satan and his forces of evil. While there are few people who murder as a way of life, there are multitudes who hate people and life in general. And the unbelieving world certainly hates Christians and Christianity.

Note: It is difficult for Christians to comprehend how unbelievers can harbor such hatred for Christianity, Christians, and life itself. We must remember that while our Father is God, a God of love and life, their father is Satan, a murderer and a liar (John 8:44).

Verse 14

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”

When John says “We know” he is contrasting the unbelieving sinner with the children of God. The evidence of a sinner “passing from death unto life” is that he “loves the brethren.” The word “love” is the Greek word *agapao* {ag-ap-ah-o} which means “self-sacrificing love.” It is not a “love” that comes from personal attraction or an emotional attachment between people. It is the kind of love Paul described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Some people in church say they have been born again, saved, that they are Christians. They can take you to a time and place where they publicly confessed Christ as Lord and Savior. They know when they were baptized and when they joined the church. But they can’t “love” their brother or sister in Christ. In fact, they often despise them. What does John say about that person? John says, “He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” Literally, John is saying “If you don’t love your brother or sister in Christ, you remain in the grip of spiritual death.”

You’re either on one side or the other. There is no middle ground here. This issue of “love” is an issue of “life” or “death.” There are only two classes of people reading this sentence. The saved who are the children of God and prove that by loving one another and the lost who are the children of the devil and prove that by not loving one another.

Verse 15

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

If you “hate” your brother, John says you are a “murderer.” The word “hate” means “detest.” In God’s eyes, everyone who detests, dislikes, finds someone intolerable, is a “murderer.” “Murderer” means “slayer of men.” In other words, if you detest someone you are like Cain who killed his brother Abel.

The only outward difference between “hate” and “murder” is the deed itself, the attitude is the same. Jesus made that clear in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-22, *“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

“No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” does not mean that a murderer cannot be saved. Saul of Tarsus was a murderer and the Lord saved him (1 Timothy 1:12-15). John is not talking about who can be saved in this verse. He is talking about who is and who is not saved! What John is saying is that someone who continues with a murderous heart and a heart full of hatred toward others is not saved.

Verse 16-17

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

“Hereby perceive we the love of God” means “this is how we come to know what real love is.” John is going to tell us now what real love is. “Because he laid down his life for us” is speaking of Christ’s giving His life for us on the cross. If that is what real love is, then “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Christians should live sacrificially for each other instead of living selfishly. If you “hate” or can’t love a brother or sister in Christ, then you are selfish. It is mind boggling that Christians will die over the biblical truth that Christ loves all sinners and died for every sinner on the cross and then won’t speak to certain people in the church! That is so selfish and so anti-Christ.

Christian should love each other to the degree that we would “lay down our lives for the brethren.” How can you “lay down your life” for your brother or sister in Christ? While the ultimate way would be to die in their place as Christ did for us, it seems John is speaking in more practice terms. What about a willingness to surrender your pride, your personal comfort, or simply meeting your brothers need. Anything of value that you are willing to give to another is to “lay down your life.”

“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” John is speaking here about indifference. Indifference to the needs of others is a deeper level of selfishness. Lost people, the unsaved, the unbelieving world of which many have “this world’s good” fail to have “compassion” for those in need. “This world’s good” means “the necessities of life.” They can’t have “compassion” because “the love of God” does not dwell in them. Now you might say, “What a minute. Sinners boast of their charitable giving and they give billions every year to worthy causes.” Yes, but they do so for their own glory and benefit and often the tax deduction.

John asks, “How dwelleth the love of God in him?” How can the “love of God” abide or remain in a person that does not meet the needs of others? That’s John’s question. The answer is, it doesn’t! And the sad truth about what John

is saying about the unbelieving world is that so many professing Christians are living and acting just like those who aren't Christians. If you are a true Christian and the love of God abides in you, you will meet the needs of others.

Believers and Love (1 John 3:18-24)

Verse 18

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

What is true of unbelievers in 1 John 3:17 is not true of believers. “My little children” is God’s title for those who are saved by grace and belong to the family of God. John is appealing to the true believers to whom he is writing to not just “love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” We should not just talk about love, we must practice love. Again, Jesus taught this truth in His kingdom teaching in Matthew 25:35-36, *“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”*

“Deed and truth” simply means what you do and what you believe about Christ and true Christian love will be demonstrated in your actions. In place of cold hateful feelings and actions toward people, the true Christian meets the needs of people and demonstrates a sacrificial giving of self in daily life.

Verse 19

“And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.”

“Hereby we know” means that this is the only way by which we can have the assurance that we are truly God’s children. As mentioned earlier in the notes, you may know the date and place where you made a public profession of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But John says the only way you can “know that you are of the truth” is by how you live and demonstrate love.

The word “know” is the Greek word *ginosko* {ghin-occe-ko} which means “to come to know, to realize, and to learn.” “Truth” here refers to the truth of Jesus Christ that has given us eternal life. “Assure” means “to persuade or tranquilize.” John is saying if you want to come to know if you really and truly belong to Jesus Christ, then see how this issue of love is working out. If love is working then your “heart” will have “assurance” or a calm peace “before him.” “Before him” is speaking about in the presence of the Lord. The only thing that gives us “assurance” or rest and peace in the awesome presence of God is knowing we are right with Him. And we know we are right with Him when we

love the brethren, meet the needs of others, and demonstrate our love in actions rather than words.

Verse 20-21

“For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

If we are born again, saved by grace, we have a new heart and Jesus abides within. Therefore, “our heart” does not “condemn us” if we are truly saved. Rather, it “assures us” that we are God’s children. “Condemn” means “to find fault with.” Notice, John says, “For if our heart condemn us...” What does he mean? Sometimes my “heart” makes me sense guilt and I am truly guilty. In other words, I’ve sinned or failed to do what I should. However, there are times when my “heart,” makes me feel guilty or unworthy and I haven’t sinned or done wrong. When you have sinned and your heart condemns you, confess it to the Lord. When your heart makes you feel guilty and you haven’t sinned, reject it and know that “God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things.”

If God has declared you righteous in Christ, then you are righteous, no matter how you feel (Romans 8:1). “God is greater” than our self-imposed guilt, our feelings of unworthiness, and our self-criticism. But how does this truth connect with our focus on loving one another? Why would our heart “condemn” us? It might condemn us if we see someone in need and conclude that we don’t need to help them, someone else will. That would be legitimate condemnation that should be confessed and made right with God.

For our “heart to not condemn us” means we might see someone in need and not convince ourselves that someone else will help them. We meet their need out of Christian love because we are truly born again. When that happens, “we have confidence toward God,” or complete assurance that we belong to God.

Note: It seems that many people who lack assurance of salvation never consider how they are loving each other. When you love as a Christian should you hardly ever struggle with doubt. If you are certain that you are a Christian and you fail to love your brothers and sisters in Christ and meet the needs of others, then you have a false assurance.

Verse 22

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

The “confidence toward God” in verse 21 is shown in the believer’s prayer life. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his

commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” If you will practice deeds of love and not condemn yourself with artificial guilt, then when you pray you have confidence that God hears and answers prayer. “Confidence” means “boldness” and “freedom of speech.” If you are loving as you should love then you can come into God’s presence in prayer and ask with confidence. Confidence in prayer is not the result of you saying the right words with the right volume and the right emphasis. It is about confidence in God’s presence because you have a changed heart.

Answered prayer also involves obedience. We are to “keep his commandments.” That is a reference to the written Scripture, not just the Ten Commandments. We are to “do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” Whatever pleases our Lord should be done by those who are His children. Love characterizes God’s children and results in assurance and answered prayer as we live in obedience to His word and do the things that bring pleasure to Him.

Verse 23

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”

John had mentioned “keeping his commandments” in verse 22. Did John mean that believers must perfectly keep or obey the Ten Commandments? No. Notice John’s answer is twofold: First, God’s commandment is “that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” Christians are called believers because we “believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” No one can love as he should love until he believes on the name of the Son of God. Second, God’s commandment is “and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” The present tense of the verb “love” signifies that the self-sacrificing love of the believer is to be a continual attitude and action. Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:34-35).

Verse 24

“And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.”

The person “that keepeth his commandments,” or believes on Jesus Christ and continually loves in attitude and actions, “dwelleth in him, and he in him.” John is describing the beautiful relationship of the believer in Christ and Christ in the believer. “Dwelleth” means “to stay, to continually dwell.” We get to know those with whom we live. We know their likes and dislikes.

This shared life the believer has with Christ is made possible “by the Spirit which he hath given us.” While much of the work and ministry of the “Spirit” is mysterious, we know that without His work no one would be saved. It is by the Holy Spirit that sinners are able to see truth from the word of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-14). It is by the Holy Spirit that sinners are regenerated and born again (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5). And it is by the Holy Spirit that believers are assured of salvation and sealed unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Conclusion

When it comes to assurance about salvation, what do you look for? Faithful church attendance? Clean living? A powerful testimony that can list names, dates, places, and time? What about feelings and emotion? And the list goes on.

Ironically, John doesn't mention any of the things listed above. What he does talk about is love. Love for other Christians and those in need? He also writes about hearts that doesn't condemn and answered prayer? These are the tests that distinguish between a child of the devil and a child of God. It is love in attitude and love in action.

Whose child are you?

Amen.