

FPFWC Christian Development



Godly Love Among Believers

November 2020

Fall Quarter

November 14, 2020

Lesson #3 –Confident Love

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 John 3:11-24

Key Verse- 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.—1 John 3:24

ICE BREAKERS-

1. How do you demonstrate your love for fellow believers?
2. Why is 1 John 3:16 just as important to memorize as John 3:16?

LESSON BACKGROUND –

The three letters of John were likely written about the same time as the Gospel of John, in the AD 80s or 90s. The letters reflect a personal relationship with the readers, like a pastor writing to his flock. Indeed, early Christian sources indicate that the apostle John left Jerusalem and his home region of Galilee to settle in the city of Ephesus. Paul had founded the church of Ephesus in the mid-50s on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1–22). The city had become a center of Christian activity, and this was strengthened by the arrival of John 15 to 20 years after Paul. At the time of the writing of 1 John, the apostle had served as a pastor for the Ephesians for more than a decade.

John wrote as the senior statesman of the church, likely the last living of the 12 original apostles. First John contains a wide range of topics that summarize the aged apostle’s teachings and advice for his beloved “children,” the Christians of Ephesus. The letters of John deal with factions within and outside the church of Ephesus, which had begun to teach many false things (examples: 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3). Included in this list were things like the denial of the true humanity of Christ (and therefore His atoning death), of the reality of sin in the lives of the teachers, and of the assurance of salvation for believers as taught by Jesus.

John wrote this epistle against a background of false teachers who came to be known as gnostics. Among other things, gnostics taught that it did not really matter if a person had morality or love—as long as he or she had “secret knowledge.” To combat this false teaching, John emphasized the interconnection of right belief, right actions, and right love. To put it another way, it is the right involvement of head, hands, and heart. The child of God must believe the truth, obey the commands, and love brothers and sisters in Christ.

John showed that such threats to the faith must be dealt with firmly and without compromise, yet with a spirit of love. Christians cannot return hate and abuse with

more hate and abuse. Even in the most contentious relationships, love must prevail. Surely this applied to John himself, whose teachings were under attack by these heretics. His original readers may have witnessed firsthand his response to his antagonists, and if this had been anything but love, the message of 1 John would have a hollow ring.

John demonstrated that if we are in the right and “walk in the truth” (3 John 3), we can bring great confidence to our relationship with anyone. This is not arrogance or elitism, but inner strength that does not depend on the approval of others for personal well-being.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

John shifted abruptly from his exploration of righteousness as an indicator that his recipients (not the secessionists) were in a right relationship with God to the love of fellow Christians as another indicator. On the connection, Donald Burdick writes, “The two concepts [righteousness and love] are not unrelated. In fact, they may be viewed as two ways of referring to the same thing. The relationship of righteousness ... and love is explicitly stated by both Jesus (Matt. 22:34–40) and Paul (Rom. 13:8–10)” (Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* [Chicago: Moody, 1985], 259). In 2:9–11, the one who does not love other believers is in moral darkness (ignorant of divine things and as a result lives in sin and error). In 3:11–24, John intensified the characteristics of those antagonistic to believers. They were like Cain (v. 12), abided in the spiritual state of death (v. 14), and did not have eternal life (v. 15). These were the traits of the secessionists who stood condemned before God.

1. Believers Love Other Believers (3:11–14)

3:11–14. The essence of the Christian **message** is **we should love one another** (v. 11). Christians must **not** be like **Cain**. He was under the influence of **the evil one**, at whose instigation he **slew his brother** (v. 12). The term **brother** stems from the Cain-Abel story of v. 12, but now is applied to spiritual family. As Cain hated Abel, much of **the world** will hate believers (v. 13). Believers are vastly different. When Christians love their brethren, they have evidence that they have **passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life**. John’s point is not so much, “If you do not love your brothers then you are not saved!” but “Because you love fellow Christians, this is one of the reassurances that you are saved.” The person **who does not love** other believers **abides in spiritual death**—i.e., is still unsaved (v. 14).

2. Unbelievers Will Hate Believers (3:15)

3:15. A lack of love for the children of God is evidence of spiritual death. **Everyone who hates**—whether an active display of hostility or a passive withholding of affection—is likened to **a murderer** who cannot have **eternal life abiding in him**.

3. Believers Sacrifice for Other Believers (3:16–18)

3:16–19. Jesus **laid down His life for us**. So **we too ought to lay down our lives for the brethren** (v. 16). A common way of demonstrating affection is assisting the needy materially. The professing believer with **the world's goods**, who refuses to help, lacks **the love of God ... in himself** (v. 17). Believers must **not love only with word or with tongue**—just talk—**but in deed** (action) **and truth** (reality, v. 18). Loving others in reality (v. 18b) is how **we ... know ... that we are of the truth** (i.e., we know that we are true believers).

4. Believers Receive Assurance through Love for Other Believers (3:19–24)

3:19–24. Love expressed in action, especially in action that demonstrates love for other Christians, **will assure our heart** of being saved (v. 19) since those who withdrew from the community John addressed had no love for Christians. A true believer might have an overly sensitive conscience (**heart**) that periodically might lead to thoughts of self-condemnation (v. 20). But John noted that **God is greater** in pronouncing a more authoritative verdict on our salvation **than our heart** (our conscience), which is fallible and often errs. God **knows all things** about us and takes everything into consideration. A conscience disarmed of any sinful accusations and that **does not condemn** enables us to **have confidence** about our being saved and living in a manner pleasing **before God** (v. 21). Another result of a clear conscience is answered prayer. **Whatever** obedient believers **ask** in accord with God's will they **receive from Him**. Jesus' atonement is the ground for prayer, but obedience is the condition for answered prayer (v. 22). God's commands are summed up in the chief command, consisting of two parts: to **believe in ... Jesus Christ, and love one another** (v. 23). Complying with divine **commandments** is evidence one **abides in** a relationship with God. Evidence that Jesus **abides** in relationship with a believer comes **by the Spirit** who is living and working in the believer's life. This evidence consists in the Spirit empowering believers "to practice righteousness" (2:29), persuading them to **believe in ... Jesus Christ** (v. 23), encouraging them to keep **His commandments** (v. 24), and leading them to "love the brethren" (3:14).

LESSON NUGGET – Deliberate sin grieves God's people, because we cannot minister to them as we should if we are not walking in love and in the light. Strive to have a heart that is right before God and men (Acts 24:16). Ask God to use you to be an encouragement and help to others (James 2). Love is more than a matter of words (v.18).

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary