

FIRST JOHN PART 7 “We Should Love One Another”

1 John 3:11 thru 18

This morning we'll be in 1 John Ch 3. As a teacher I think it's good whenever we do a book study like 1 John to have a little background. I think it's important for us to understand why the words were written in the first place. Why is it that John wrote this letter?

As most of you know I'm working on a book. At one point I explain why we have all the epistles, the letters – all those books between Acts and Revelation. This is how I explain the whole reason behind the writing of the epistles (which includes 1 John) in my book...

After Jesus' resurrection, He gave His followers a mission – to go and preach the Gospel and to make disciples. After Jesus left and went back to heaven He sent the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowered Jesus' followers, the church that He established, to carry out His mission. The Gospel then spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and then across the entire Roman Empire.

Then persecution came. There were constant clashes between the church and the culture of the day. False teachers led many astray. Temptations, quarrels and various struggles made their way into the church. These tested the church's resolve to carry out its mission. Godly direction was desperately needed. This direction came from two primary sources by the Holy Spirit and (2) by the apostles. The apostle's words, their teachings have been preserved for us in what we call The Epistles *[then I discuss briefly what an epistle is]*

So the apostles are passing on what they know to the next generation of believers. John received his training, his knowledge, not from books or seminary. His formal training came from Jesus Himself.

All of these letters, like 1 John, have a real and historical context. The original audience (whoever they are) would have been aware of all the

background information. As a result the specific details aren't mentioned. Think about it this way – when we read the Epistles we're reading someone else's mail. We get basic information – the context – from whatever details are mentioned by the author in the letter.

So in 1 John the Apostle John is not just sitting down at his desk and writing a theological discourse. Something is driving John to write this particular group. He's apparently familiar with his audience. He writes to reassure them about their faith and to renew the confidence that has apparently been shaken by false teachings. At this point in history the Christian faith is about 60 years old and it has already spread throughout much of the civilized world. There is pressure on many churches to adopt as part of their faith ideas from the secular Greek philosophies that are so popular in that day. False teachers have infiltrated the church. Some of them deny the incarnation of Christ (that He appeared in human flesh). Some draw a complete distinction between the spiritual, which they consider to be pure, and the material, which they see as evil (Gnosticism). This letter counters such heresies. That's the big picture background.

[Handout about Contrasts in First John] John's style of writing is to use contrasts. And in 1 John there are a whole bunch of them addressing the conflicts, problems that exist in the church – a lot of different issues. I just mentioned false teachers. They are teaching something completely different from what the apostles taught about Christ and Christianity. That's a problem! Persecution is creating a crisis of faith in the church. Many are beginning to wonder if they are really saved or not. That's a problem! Sin is pervasive in the culture and it is negatively affecting believers. That's a problem! All of this combine to rob believers of joy. So John writes to help settle these issues. [weaving] At the heart of John's message to the church he is showing the basic differences between what and what? Believers and unbelievers. Here is what a believer looks like. Here is what an unbeliever looks like. Very different! That's the big picture of what's going on in 1 John.

So as we come to Chapter 3 John is contrasting true believers from unbelievers. He shines the spotlight, if you will, on two specific characteristics of true believers, real born-again Christians.

READ 1 John 3:7-8a

John says that a true believer practices righteousness. He or she lives a godly lifestyle; but an unbeliever practices sin. This is what we focused on last time. V 10 is a transitional verse...

READ 1 John 3:10

This introduces us to our topic for today, which is, our love for our brothers (and sisters), our love for other Christians. John has just addressed a Christian's behavior (v 4-10). Now he's going to talk about a Christian's love (v 11-18). As John sees it, one key indicator that we are really saved is our love for other Christians. Follow along as I read our passage for this morning beginning in v 11. John explains what real Christian love looks like.

READ 1 John 3:11-18

I've mentioned before John's spiral style of argument. He introduces something and then later on he talks about it some more; he goes a little deeper with it; then later on he brings it up again and expounds even more on it. Here's an example of that. John talked about love earlier in this letter. In Ch 2 he talks about an old commandment that you heard from the beginning. This is a reference back to the law. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Then John says at the same time it's a new commandment. The reason he says it's a new commandment is because that's what Jesus called it: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another" (John 13:34). Jesus takes an old truth found in the law and He applies it on a deeper level. Basically, a true believer loves like God loves and Jesus modeled that kind of love for us. That was Ch 2. Then he talks about love here in Ch 3. And then he is going to bring it up again later in Ch 4. That's just John's style.

In v 11 John resumes his discussion of loving one another – “the message that you have heard from the beginning.” This is what we apostles have been teaching you all along. And what truths did the apostles teach? Where did they get these truths from? See Q2, from Jesus. They now pass along the same truths that Jesus had taught to them years before. Let me give you a sound bite taken when Jesus taught this subject to His disciples...

READ John 15:12-13, 17.

John says that this isn't anything that you haven't heard before. This is basic stuff. This is what Jesus taught. So when John says in v 11 “we should love one another...” Is this optional for Christians? Not according to Jesus. NO it is commanded by our Lord Himself. It is NOT optional.

V 12, John says that Cain “was of the evil one.” He just got done saying in v 8, “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil.” Cain is an example of such a person. John says don't be like CAIN. Who is Cain? What did Cain do? He murdered his own brother! In the text John asks and answers the question, why did Cain kill his brother (Abel)? Because Cain was evil while his brother was righteous. Hatred. Ungodliness always hates godliness. Can't stand it. Wants to silence it. Stomp it out. Evil hates good. Those that are evil will do whatever they can to discredit, to bash, to punish, to persecute, to legislate against, to get rid of those who are not evil like they are. Evil hates the truth. Evil hates godliness. Just like Satan hates God.

Genesis Ch 4 tells us the whole story of Cain and Abel. You have these two brothers, both working hard and both worshipping the one true God. They had God-fearing parents, Adam and Eve. Cain wasn't a heathen idol worshipper. But as the story unfolds we're told that God accepts Abel's offering but rejects Cain's offering. We're not told why. Many Bible teachers focus on the two different kinds of offering the two brothers were offering. They conjecture that God accepted Abel's offering because it was of the flocks while rejecting Cain's offering because it was of the fruit of the

ground. They'll say the reason God rejected Cain's offering was because it was not the proper kind of offering. But the Bible doesn't say that. I believe the fundamental reason why God "had no regard" for Cain's offering was that Cain's heart was not right. Here's why I say that. In Psalm 51 David had great insight when he said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Isaiah knew the kind of heart God was looking for when he said this in Isaiah 66: "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word."

OK, so what SHOULD Cain have done when God rejected his offering? Gone back and got a sheep from Abel's flock and made a blood sacrifice before God? No. Cain should have repented, confessed his sin before God. There was something inside of Cain, in his heart that was not right. God knew this and exposed it. Cain should have done whatever it took to get things right between him and God. That's what David did when he was confronted with his sin by Nathan. But Cain, instead of doing business with God, got very upset and he went out and killed his brother. In Cain's case murder was the outward manifestation of something that was going on inside of him. Why did Cain react the way he did? Because, bottom line, he was evil. He had an ungodly heart. He was a child of the devil rather than a child of God. That's what John says. So this example, this contrast using Cain is just driving home what John had said in the previous verses.

V 13, I want you to follow the progression of John's thought here. Cain hated Abel. Ungodliness hates godliness. The unrighteous hate the righteous. The world which is evil hates Christians and Christianity. They hate Christians for all the reasons listed.

READ John 15:18-21, 25

So why do we act so surprised when the world out there hates us? That's who they are! We shouldn't be surprised at the animosity the world shows us. In fact, we should expect it.

V 14, Here is one of John's contrasts: We Christians have been given the gift of eternal life thru our faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore we have the capacity to love. By contrast unbelievers abide in death. They do not love.

V 15, Like Cain, they hate their brothers. That is who they are.

One thing I need to point out about this passage. When it says that "no murderer has eternal life" it's NOT suggesting that people who commit murder cannot be saved. David comes to mind. Moses also. Even Paul who was an accessory to murder. This passage is describing the character of a person who John says is NOT a believer. In that sense they are like Cain.

How is it that we even have the capacity to love? How can that be? God transforms our hearts. We then become new creatures in Christ. We are given a whole new nature. The problem we have is that we still have the old nature to deal with.

V 16-17, Here we have another contrast: We Christians love to the same extent that Jesus did. And like Jesus (He willingly died on the cross for us), we should be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember what Jesus said in the passage I read earlier: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). By contrast unbelievers are selfish, consumed with themselves, indifferent to anyone else's needs and "close their heart" to other people. Lesson last time: John is not saying that Christians will never sin. And he is not saying that unbelievers will never do what is good and right. He's talking about a habitual behavior, a lifestyle.

At the end of v 17 John asks, "How does God's love abide in him?" The "him" here refers back to that person who has all the resources, who sees the need, and yet closes his heart to it. The obvious answer, "It doesn't!" Why not? Because they're not saved. This is evident by their lack of love. This is John's conclusion (under the inspiration of the H.S.).

James 1:27 in the NLT says, "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father – this is what it looks like – caring for orphans and widows

in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.” James is saying that genuine Christians love like Jesus loved. They show compassion like Jesus showed. That’s what a real Christian does.

READ 1 John 3:18

Our love as Christians is our testimony. It shows others how Jesus has changed us. We don’t just talk about loving. And love isn’t just a feeling. We show love BY OUR ACTIONS. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). They will see it on display.

V 19 which we will get to next week basically says that our love, our loving actions prove that we belong to the truth and will be confident on the day we stand before God. Our love is an assurance of our salvation.

So application is simply this – we know that we are to love. But how should we love? Here is a pretty good summary of what John has been telling us and it comes from Paul...

READ Ephesians 5:1-2 (Living Letters): “Follow God’s example in everything you do just as a much loved child imitates his father. Be full of love for others, following the example of Christ who loved you and gave himself to God as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, for Christ’s love for you was like sweet perfume to him.”

Love like Jesus loved. A selfless sacrificial compassionate life is a life that is pleasing to God. Do you want to hear “Well done, good and faithful servant?” Then live like that.