

Unit III: Godly Love among Believers

Loving Others

DEVOTIONAL READING: Hebrews 13:1-8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 John 3:11-24; 2 John 4-11; 3 John 5-8

PRINT PASSAGE: 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, KJV)

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The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. (1 John 3:24, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explore the many dimensions of loving others according to 1 John 3.
- Embrace God's commandments to love with obedience and expectation.
- Identify ways to grow in your faith in Jesus and your love for others.

*Key Terms

Actions (verse 18)—Greek: *ergon* (er'-gon): works; tasks; deeds; "deed" (KJV).

Hates (verse 15)—Greek: *miseó* (mis-eh'-o): detests; loves less; "hateth" (KJV).

Heart(s) (verse 21)—Greek: *kardia* (kar-dee'-ah): the heart, mind, character, inner self, will, intention.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

In the business world, owners desire to create a brand around their business. A *brand* is defined as the collective impact or lasting impression from all that is seen, heard, or experienced by customers who come in contact with a company and/or its products and services (Andrew Beattie, "How Companies Create a Brand," Investopedia.com, June 25, 2019). Branding



The Biblical Context

When the apostle John composed this letter, his purpose was to confront the heresy of Gnosticism that was infecting the churches in Asia Minor with false doctrine. Gnosticism taught that the physical world was inherently evil and spiritual, unseen things were good. Practically explained, its proponents denied Christ's incarnation and taught that He could not have taken on a physical human body because matter was evil. John possessed a true pastor's heart and therefore wrote to oppose this doctrinal threat and to encourage and reassure the faithful and genuine believers. John primarily focuses on the theme of tests of reality in the Christian life. Outlines of this letter differ among scholars, but after his introduction in 1 John 1:1-4, his focus is on obedience, love, and truth as he discusses how to identify true fellowship and true Christianity. The focus of the Printed Text is upon tests that identify demonstrable love for fellow believers (see 1 John 3:11-18) and tests for adherence to God's commands (see 1 John 3:19-24).

requires managing the effect that a business's products or services have on the customer. The brand becomes a promotional strategy designed to enhance sales and usage. Beattie suggests four specific elements for creating a vital brand: consistency (the brand must have the same message and effect on every customer); differentiation (the brand creates a gap between itself and competitors in the mind of the consumer); creativity (the brand is the product of innovative ideas that produce unique messages); and emotional connection (the brand creates a gap between itself and the competitors in the mind of the consumer). The concept of branding can be applied to Christ's disciples. What is their unique "brand" that is readily recognized inside and outside the church? During His final discourse with His disciples, Jesus commanded them to love each other as He loved them. He went further and told them that the world would know they belonged to Him if they visibly demonstrated love for each other (see John 13:35). The Christian's "brand" is love. It is the differentiating characteristic from the world.

When Christians consistently practice loving each other, it can appeal to the unsaved and motivate them to desire to experience this love by accepting the gift of salvation. The same John that recorded this command of Christ in his gospel also admonished the recipients of his first epistle to obey the command to love one another as they had been taught. If believers are to positively attract the lost, they must obediently use their "brand" of love for one another.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Love: The Evidence Test (1 John 3:11-15)

KJV

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

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.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

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.

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

NIV

11 For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

13 Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

15 Anyone who *hates* a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

How can the Christian be distinguished as belonging to God and not to the realm of Satan? The authentic identifying mark of the Christian is love. In admonishing his readers to stay true to the doctrinal truth they had been taught (**verse 11**), John expounded upon the importance of adherence to the command to love one another, which was the ethical truth they had previously been taught. Obeying this command is the evidence that the believer's behavior is radically different from the heretics' and the unsaved's. This was also proof of the believer's salvation. John followed his emphasis on the importance of love by contrasting God's children (those who love) with the children of Satan (those who hate). He used Cain, the first murderer, as his example (**verse 12**). Cain was presented as a worshipper of God but was actually being energized by Satan, the evil one (Genesis 4:1-16). Jealousy and envy were aroused in Cain because of his ungodly character. As a result, he brutally killed his brother Abel like a butcher slaughtering an animal. Cain responded like his spiritual father Satan, who is a murderer and a liar (see John 8:44). His attitude was the same as this present world's; therefore, believers should not be surprised that they are hated by it (**verse 13**). The world hated Christ for essentially the same reason Cain hated and killed his brother Abel. Christ exposes sin and reveals unrighteousness. It hated Him for this reason and will likewise hate His followers. In fact, another evidence of salvation is that of Christians' being hated by the world. This example shows us that hatred among Christians is abnormal behavior. The presence of love in one's life is evidence of the possession of eternal life, and the lack of it is evidence of spiritual death (**verse 14**). John makes it clear to his audience that in God's eyes, everyone who hates his brother is a murderer (**verse 15**; see Matthew 5:22). Those who continuously harbor hateful attitudes and murderous thoughts give evidence of an

unregenerate heart—and unless they repent they will suffer eternal punishment. The antidote is for Christians to persistently pursue growing in visible and practical Christlikeness.

Q What Do You Think? What is the relationship between “settled hate” against another and actual physical murder?

Love Demonstrated (1 John 3:16-18)

KJV

16 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.

17 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?

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

NIV

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with *actions* and in truth.

Loving others is the Christian's unique brand. However, this love is not a sentimental feeling, but it is best shown through sacrificial service to others. John reminds us that Jesus had already shown the supreme and ultimate example of what love is like. He laid down His life for humankind while they were still His enemies (**verse 16**). With Him as the model, Christians should be prepared to make similar sacrifices for others, especially those within the community of faith. Although the requirement to literally lay down one's life for another may not arise, there are other sacrifices that can be made that emulate Christ's love. John explains that those who genuinely love and have material resources available cannot let the opportunity pass to meet the obvious needs of others. John emphasizes that practical love is more than words and that it is the willingness to help others (**verses 17-18**). For the believer, actions do speak louder than words. It is not enough to parrot “I love you.” The evidence of genuine love is deeds.

Q What Do You Think? According to 1 John 3:11-18, how can you recognize God's children?

Love Produces Confidence (1 John 3:19-24)

KJV

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

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our *heart* condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

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

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.

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.

NIV

19 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:

20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

21 Dear friends, if our *hearts* do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

24 The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

The demands of the Word of God set high standards for our lives. If we are honest, we realize that we have not arrived and that the struggle is real. As believers, we have embraced and desire to meet His standards but find that we often fail. It is then that our consciences indict us and can lead to feelings of depression, insecurity, and even doubt of the genuineness of our salvation. John was aware of this, and in this section he wrote to encourage his readers that failures are not defeats and that God is aware and understands. **Verse 19** directs us back to the command to love others (see verse 18). When we know we sincerely love others, this is the evidence that we are literally practicing the truth of God's Word. This knowledge assures our hearts. If our hearts do condemn us because of some failure after we have been engaged in practical acts of love, we can remind ourselves that God is well aware of our commitment to the truth

(verse 20). John's purpose was to console those believers who were living up to the standard of loving others but were still struggling with sin in their lives. God knows our hearts and true motives and will not judge them wrongly. If, on the other hand, we are walking in obedience and are not condemned by our hearts, a new confidence is produced that allows us to enter His presence without fear and with the assurance of answered prayer (verses 21-22). Loving others does not earn automatic answers to or affirmations of our prayers, but it communicates to God that we are living within His will. Living in His will places us in the position to receive answers that align with His will for our lives.

Verse 23 provides a kind of climax to what John has taught beginning with verse 18. He collapses the necessity of personal faith, believing in the name of Jesus, and loving others into a single command. As believers engage in loving others through practical deeds and live lives of confident faith in the name of Jesus, they are obeying what God has commanded. Faith in Christ and love for others are inseparable and non-negotiable imperatives for all true believers. There is a blessing promised for those who keep these commandments (verse 24). Christ will abide or remain in the believer while the believer abides in Him. This spiritual and mutual relationship is evidenced through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is an assurance for our daily living. As we abide in and remain faithfully obedient to Christ, He nourishes us spiritually, enabling us to live right and bear spiritual fruit.

Q What Do You Think? What assurance is given to those of us who may condemn ourselves for failing to live up to God's standards?

A Closing Thought


Loving others is the "brand" of the Christian life. It is the fundamental virtue that distinguishes the children of God from the children of Satan. It is also the source of confidence and a remedy for self-condemnation when we fail to reach God's standards. Strength for loving others is always available because of the abiding presence of our Christ through the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is to consistently obey His commands and pray according to His will for our lives.

Your Life

John pointed out a sure evidence of genuine salvation: loving the brethren (1 John 3:14). If you know that to be true of your walk with the Lord and have been struggling with periods of self-doubt and self-condemnation, encourage your heart to know that you are living the truth of His Word.

Your World!

Love for others is the missing virtue in the world at-large. As believers, we need to make sure that we are setting the example Christ left by letting the lost “see” our love for one another through compassionate, self-sacrificing deeds. How else will a world in need of Christ know that we belong to Him?

 **Closing Prayer** Dear Lord, we are aware that this world is in need of Your kind of love—not a love expressed in words only, but one that results in compassionate deeds. Convict our hearts and give us discernment to see needs and respond like Your Son did—with sacrificial and unconditional love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

In preparation for next week’s lesson, read Acts 4:32–5:11 and identify how the early church demonstrated godly love among themselves.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , November 16	“Preparing to Become a Deacon”	(1 Timothy 3:8-13)
TUESDAY , November 17	“A Healing Ministry Grows the Church”	(Acts 5:12-16)
WEDNESDAY , November 18	“A Church Sharing Plan Is Enlarged”	(Acts 6:1-7)
THURSDAY , November 19	“Stephen’s Ministry Is Opposed”	(Acts 6:8-15)
FRIDAY , November 20	“Sharing All of Life Together”	(Acts 2:42-47)
SATURDAY , November 21	“Prayer for Boldness and Signs”	(Acts 4:23-31)
SUNDAY , November 22	“Sharing All Possessions Challenges the Church”	(Acts 4:32–5:11)

Notes
