Sunday, November 15, 2020

Lesson: I John 3:11-24; Time of Action: 90-95 A.D.; Place of Action: John probably writes from Ephesus

Golden Text: “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” (I John 3:24).

I. INTRODUCTION. How do we know that we are truly Christians? The answer given to us in this week’s lesson is very simple in nature. We have learned to love others because of Jesus. The world is looking for genuine Christianity so that they can follow it, but unfortunately, it is hard to find. It’s like a breath of fresh air when we find someone who loves unconditionally and who has learned to react to situations the way Jesus would. Love is the sign of those who say they are following Jesus.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. I John was written by John, one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples. He is also the author of the Gospel of John and widely believed to be “the disciple that Jesus loved” (see John 21:20), and along with Peter and James, he had a special relationship with Jesus (see Matthew 26:36-37; Mark 9:2; 14:32-33). This letter was not written to
any specific church, but was sent as a pastoral letter to several Gentile congregations and all believers everywhere. This letter was probably written between 90 and 95 A.D. from Ephesus before John was exiled to the island of Patmos (see Revelation 1:9). After Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., Christians were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. By the time John wrote this letter, Christianity had been around for more than a generation. The main problem facing the church at this time was declining commitment. Many believers were conforming to the world’s standards, failing to stand up for Christ and compromising their faith. False teachers were plentiful, and they were accelerating the church’s downward slide away from the Christian faith. At the time of the letter, false teachers had entered the church denying the incarnation (becoming human) of Jesus Christ (see I John 2:18-23). John wrote to correct these serious errors. He opens this letter by declaring that he was an eyewitness to the humanity of Christ while stating his reason for writing (see I John 1:1-4). He then presents God as “light,” symbolizing absolute purity and holiness (see John 1:5-7), and he explains how believers can walk in God’s light and have fellowship with Him (see I John 1:8-10) with Christ as their defender (see I John 2:1-2). John urges his readers to obey Christ fully and to love all the members of God’s family (see I John 2:3-17). He warns his readers of “antichrists” and the antichrist who will try to lead them away from the truth (see I John 2:18-29). The Apostle wrote to assure true believers that they possessed eternal life and to help them know that their faith was real in light of the return of Jesus Christ (see I John 2:28-3:1-10). Our lesson begins with verse 11 as John gives another way to identify Christians’—love for
others.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF THE ABSENCE OF LOVE (I John 3:11-15)

A. God’s children characterized (I John 3:11). Our first verse says “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” In verse 10, John spoke of the difference between “the children of God” and “the children of the devil” declaring that “whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” So here, John continued to remind his readers that they were to “love one another.” John had already reminded his readers that this “message” to “love one another” was not a new revelation (see I John 2:7). Now he said that it was “the message that ye heard from the beginning.” The word “beginning” here does not mean the “beginning” of the world, instead it refers to when they first accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ and began their Christian experience (see Philippians 4:15; I John 2:7). Even though the command to “love one another” is not new to the Christian, we must be reminded frequently of the importance of showing Christian “love” in all our actions, attitudes, and words. In addition, we would do well to remind ourselves that although salvation is free and eternal, those of us who are saved have the moral obligation to live a Christlike life. If salvation transforms us on the inside (see II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:4-5), it is only logical that our minds, emotions, and wills should be
renewed and our behavior conforms to God’s will (see Ephesians 2:10). **Note:** There are three basic Greek words for love. “Phileo” describes a love between friends. “Eros” describes sexual love and is not found in the Bible. “Agape” describes a selfless, sacrificing love. “Agape” is the word John uses when speaking of love. It is not an emotional love based on the attractiveness of another person. It is the word used of God’s “love” for sinners who certainly are not attractive to Him (see John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Instead, “Agape” describes a “love” produced by reason and the will and deliberately chooses the object to be loved. This is a divine love that never seeks its own gratification, but always seeks the good of others (see I Corinthians 13:4). It’s the love that Christ had for us in giving His life for us. This is the same love that God expects us to show. However, in our own power we cannot pass the test of loving one another as Christ loved us. This is a job for the Holy Spirit, for love is a fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). The natural spirit and heart of man is “evil continually” (see Genesis 6:5), but when we submit to the Holy Spirit, He empowers us to overcome hate, malice, and envy and teaches us brotherly kindness instead.

**B. Satan’s children described (I John 3:12-13).**

1. (vs. 12). In this verse John gives an example of someone who is lacking love. He said “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.” John followed his command to “love one another” (see verse 11) with a negative illustration. He said “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.” The phrase “Not as Cain” indicates that believers are to love one another and not be like Cain “who was of that wicked one.” As previously noted, John had identified children of the devil by two characteristics: they don’t practice righteousness nor do they love their brothers (see I John 3:10). Now he named someone who had both of these characteristics. John said that “Cain” belonged to the “wicked one,” the devil whom Jesus called “a murderer from the beginning” (see John 8:44). The infamous “Cain” is remembered because he was the world’s first murderer (see Genesis 4:1-8). The Greek word translated “slew” speaks of brutal slaughter. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses this word to describe the butchering of sacrificial animals. This indicates that the first crime in human history was extremely vicious (see Genesis 4:8-15). John then asked, “And wherefore slew he him?” or why did Cain do it? He answered his own question saying “Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.” In other words, “Cain” killed “his brother” because his deeds were “evil” while Abel’s deeds were “righteous.” The account of this murder in Genesis chapter 4 does not specifically tell us what was “evil” about Cain’s “works” nor what was “righteous” about Abel’s. But we do know that Abel, in faith offered a sacrifice pleasing to God (see Hebrews 11:4). As the Book of Genesis relates, “Cain” was angry because his brother Abel was accepted by God and he was not (see Genesis 4:2-5). Even when the LORD gave “Cain” an opportunity to repent
and offer an acceptable sacrifice, he refused and instead rose up and killed his brother (see Genesis 4:6-8). Since “Cain... was of that wicked one,” he could not please God. John may have remembered how Jesus had accused the hostile Jews of being the devil’s children (see John 8:44). This condition does not come about because a person commits an especially despicable sin. It is the natural condition of everyone before receiving Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:1-3). Only an infusion of divine life (see Ephesians 1:12-14) can enable a person to escape from Satan’s influence (see Colossians 1:12-14; I John 5:18). Note: The problem “Cain” had with Abel was a religious one. God established the way of sacrifice, but “Cain” wanted to follow his own “evil” way of religious observance. Abel followed God’s righteous way. Abel is a type of the spiritual man. His sacrifice, in which atoning blood was shed (see Hebrews 9:22), was his confession of sin and the expression of his faith in a substitute (see Romans 5:6; Hebrews 11:4). In contrast to Abel, Cain’s bloodless offering of the fruit of the ground proclaims even in the early stages of the human race, the truth that “without shedding of blood is no remission” (see Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). “Cain” acknowledged God as the source of all natural good, but he rejected God’s revealed way of worship. Abel, on the other hand, brought a blood offering therefore, admitting that he was a sinner. All false religion began with “Cain” which is the essence of man’s attempts to come to God in his or her own way. It should be noted that both of these brothers brought sacrifices to God. “Cain” isn’t presented as someone who didn’t believe in God; he is presented as a worshiper just like Abel was.
And this is the point: children of the devil pretend to be true believers. They attend religious gatherings and may even bring offerings as “Cain” did. But these actions in themselves are not real proof that a man or woman is born of God. The real test is his or her love for the brethren (see John 13:35) and “Cain” failed that test miserably.

2. (vs. 13). This verse says, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” From John’s illustration of Cain and Abel, we might have expected him to urge the readers not to be like Cain, but instead he turned in a different direction saying “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.” The words “marvel not” mean “don’t be surprised.” John was warning his readers not to be surprised when they find that “the world hates” them. Likewise, Christians should not be surprised if we are hated by “the world” (see I Peter 4:12-13). The word “world” here refers to unbelievers who live by standards that don’t come from God (see I John 2:15-16). Since Cain was “of that wicked one” (see verse 12), he was part of “the world.” That’s also true of all who have not been spiritually born again. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are under Satan’s control and share his philosophy. This “world” hated Jesus and sought to destroy Him. As a result, Jesus also warned His disciples about the world’s hatred when He said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (see John 15:18-19). Obviously, we can’t expect any better treatment from “the world” than the LORD Jesus received. 

Note: Jesus even warned the apostles that a time was coming when those who killed them would think that
they were doing a service to God (see John 16:2). The truth is, we should expect to be persecuted for our faith. Paul warned Timothy saying “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (see II Timothy 3:12). Perhaps one of the reasons so many of us are not persecuted for our faith is because we too often blend in with the world around us (see II Timothy 3:1-5).


1. (vs. 14). This verse says “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” John now contrasted his Christian readers with “the world” (see verse 13). He places special emphasis on the pronoun “we” for Christians. The thought is that unlike the world, “we (Christians) know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” The term “life” here does not refer to physical “life” but to spiritual “life” which is eternal and found in Jesus Christ (see John 10:10, 28; 17:3; Romans 6:23). John stated that this “life,” meaning eternal “life” is the present possession of all believers which means that we have it now because we “have passed” into “life.” The words “have passed” are in the past tense indicating an action that’s already completed. “We know,” or are sure of “life” by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8; Hebrews 11:1). John then gave the reason why we are confident that “we have passed from death unto life;” it is “because we love the brethren.” Simply
put, we have taken a transforming journey from the realm of spiritual death (which is also eternal; see Matthew 25:45-46) into the realm of spiritual "life," and the proof of this is that "we love the brethren" meaning other believers. Faith brings the believer into eternal "life," but "love" for other believers prove that we have completed the journey. Showing divine sacrificial "love" for our fellow believers is proof that we have eternal "life." The word "love" here is in the Greek present tense meaning that this agape "love" is continuous and is a habit. "Love" never fails (see I Corinthians 13:8). Although believers are to "love" everybody, in this verse John is specifically referring to other Christians when he uses the word "brethren" (see Acts 12:17; Romans 7:4; 12:1; Philippians 4:8). John also reminded his readers (and us) that the opposite is true. He said "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." Of course, John wasn’t referring to physical "death," he was referring to the fact that the person who “does not love his brother” remains in their natural condition: dead in trespasses and sins” (see Ephesians 2:1). In other words, anyone who doesn’t love others “abideth” or remains in spiritual "death," that is, in sin in which everyone was born (see I Corinthians 15:22). That person has never been transformed and therefore, does not possess divine “love.” This does not mean that unbelievers cannot show kindness and “love” to one another. The problem is they don’t have the divine ability to “love” others, especially Christians or our God. Note: While eternal “life” is often depicted as something that will be received in the future (see Titus 3:7), John stated that this “life” is the present possession of the saints. The words in this verse are
quite similar to John 5:24 where Jesus says “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

2. (vs. 15). This verse says “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” Using very strong language, John declared that anyone who “hateth his brother” meaning fellow believers, “is a murderer.” In other words, they are as guilty as if they had actually committed murder. Hatred in the heart often preceded the outward act of murder. It’s unlikely that any of John’s readers had literally murdered a brother, but they had possibly committed murder in their hearts (see Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28; 12:35: 15:19; Mark 7:21-22). Since God sees hating as a form of murder, John was clear in stating the eternal ramifications of hatred. He said “and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” This doesn’t mean that murder is an unpardonable sin. Some well known heroes of faith were guilty of murder such as Moses (see Exodus 2:11-14), David (see II Samuel 11:14-17), and Paul (see Acts 22:4; 26:10). All of them were forgiven. John was simply stressing the seriousness of the sin of hatred and how impossible it was to stay in fellowship with God while harboring hatred toward a brother or sister in Christ. Unfortunately, many who profess faith in Christ exhibit murderous attitudes toward others.
IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF BROTHERLY LOVE (I John 3:16-18)

A. Christ’s example (I John 3:16). This verse says “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.” The word “perceive” is the same word that in other places is frequently rendered “know” (see I John 2:3, 29; 4:13). To “perceive” God’s “love” is to know God’s love! The primary way that we know God loves us is because “he laid down his life for us.” The essence of divine “love” is self-sacrifice and Jesus is the supreme example. There is no greater demonstration of God’s “love” for sinners than the death of Christ on Calvary (see John 10:11; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:25). Since Jesus set the supreme example of sacrificial “love” for believers, John challenged Christians by saying “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” While this may include literally giving one’s life for a fellow believer, the truth is, we can never do for others what Jesus did for us. However, in a limited way we ought to be willing to make that ultimate sacrifice. But there are other ways we can make sacrifices for fellow Christians. Certainly, helping those in need is an appropriate way to do this.


1. (vs. 17). In this verse, John poses a question to his readers. He asked, “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?**” The word “seeth” here means more than just a passing glance at someone in need. It has the idea of recognizing and understanding that need. Therefore, John’s question is this: “How can God’s love dwell in anyone who has plenty and recognizes that a fellow Christian has a need, and refuses to have compassion or mercy on him by sharing what he has?” Putting this in perspective, if “love” can motivate us to sacrifice our life for someone, certainly it should motivate us to sacrifice our goods for someone. “Love” will not allow a believer to “shutteth up his bowels of compassion” from a believer in need. This simply means that “love” will prompt us to show pity and mercy on a needy fellow believer. We won’t selfishly hold on to our material goods when we know a believer is in need, and we have the means to help. **Note:** There are needy people who can and should be helped by their Christian brethren. This may include people who are sick, out of work, or otherwise suffering financially. To these, we should reach out and help, for in doing so we are ministering to Jesus (see Matthew 25:31-46). Although our primary concern should be for those in the family of faith, or other believers, we should not exclude helping anyone (see Galatians 6:10).

2. (vs. 18). In this verse, John goes on to say “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” As an apostle and leader in the Christian church, John lovingly addresses his readers as “My little children.” He then encourages them saying “let us not love in word, neither in tongue.” In other words, genuine “love” is not shown by “words” that
really don’t mean anything. Genuine “love” is demonstrated “in deed and in truth” not just telling people we care. As James 2:15 says, “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” The evidence that we have God’s “love” is action or what we do. Concrete action must back up the fact that we have God’s “love” living in our hearts. However, since actions can be hypocritical, we must be sure that our acts of “love” are done “in truth” meaning that they are sincere.

V. CONFIDENCE TOWARD GOD (I John 3:19-24)

A. Confidence: the result of loving in deed and truth (I John 3:19). Here John continues to say “And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him (God).” The words “And hereby” refer back to the divine love believers should show “in deed and in truth” (see verse 18). Just in case John’s previous words could cause his readers to have feelings of spiritual failure and discouragement that all Christians experience, he told them that if they practiced divine love (see verse 18), they could “know” or be confident that they were “of the truth” meaning people of God. John said that understanding this “shall assure our hearts before him (God).” In other words, if we have any doubts in “our hearts” or our conscience, about our salvation, knowing that
we practice genuine love confirms that we are saved. It’s true that love doesn’t save us, but showing it assures us that God dwells in us. By loving in deed and “truth,” believers can “know” that we are children of the God “of truth” (see John 14:6). Those who are truly redeemed have a confidence in their hearts that only God can give. Indeed, the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirits that we are God’s children (see Romans 8:16).


1. (vs. 20). In this verse John goes on to say “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” Sometimes Satan and the false teachers he inspires will try to get us to doubt our salvation. John describes this as our “heart” condemning us. The word “heart” here refers to our conscience. The apostle was saying that “if our heart (or conscience) condemn us” or causes us to question our salvation because we may have sinned, we can be assured that “God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” In other words, since God knows everything, He knows better what’s in “our hearts” than we do because He “is greater than our heart.” We may misjudge ourselves, but God, who is omniscient, never does. **Note:** Many who profess to know Jesus Christ as Saviour have doubts from time to time about whether they truly belong to the LORD. They question whether their profession of faith was or is genuine. Such doubts often arise when a believer falls into sin. It’s quite appropriate for someone who professes faith in Jesus
Christ but is controlled by sin to have doubts. Such doubts should at least cause believers to examine themselves to see whether they are truly in the faith. However, Christians shouldn’t find themselves constantly in doubt. Thankfully, “God, who is greater than our heart” or conscience, pronounces a more authoritative verdict about who we are than we do because we may sometimes have doubts. When God declares that we belong to Him, His verdict is based on His perfect knowledge of us and includes all relevant circumstances including everything we say and do. Our worst is always known to Him, and He still loves us. God knew David’s sins, but He still said that David was a man after His heart (see Acts 13:22). This should assure us that God has forgiven us of our sins for Christ’s sake, and we can enjoy peace of conscience. However, we must always take time for self-examination, and if we find that we have any un-confessed sin, we need to confess it immediately (see I Corinthians 11:27-29; I John 1:9) to be restored to fellowship with Christ. Remember, when we are saved and we sin, we can’t lose our salvation or relationship with Christ (see John 10:27-29; Romans 8:35-39), but we can lose our fellowship with Him (see Psalms 66:18; I John 1:5-8). That’s why we need to confess any un-confessed sin and repent in order to restore the fellowship.

2. (vs. 21). In this verse John says “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” The phrase “if our heart condemn us not”
means that our conscience is clear regarding sin and we have no doubts about our salvation. When we are sure of our relationship with Christ, John said “then have we confidence toward God.” In other words, when our conscience is clear, “we have confidence” that we can approach God. Gaining “confidence” before God requires that our “hearts” (conscience) don’t “condemn us” because of sins of omission (faced with doing what is right, but we do nothing).

C. The benefit of confidence (I John 3:22-23).

1. (vs. 22). Still talking about having confidence in God, John goes on to say in this verse “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” The conjunction “And” connects this verse with verse 21. When we have an un-condemning heart or conscience that assures us we are God’s children (see Romans 8:15-17), John said this assures us that “whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.” If our conscience is clear, we can come to God without fear, confident that our requests will be heard. Of course, God does not give us whatever we ask automatically. Only petitions or requests that are in God’s will for the believer will be granted (see I John 5:14-15). **Note:** It is true that Jesus promised that one who asks receives (see Matthew 7:7-8), and that God responds to the prayer of faith (see Mark 11:24). However, we must interpret these promises in light of all scriptural teachings on prayer. John said one of the conditions for having our prayers answered is that “we keep
his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” The Apostle made it clear that success in prayer requires obedience to God’s commands and doing whatever pleases Him. We will receive if we obey and do what pleases God because we will be asking in line with His will. Of course, this does not mean that we can have anything we want, like instant riches. If we are truly seeking God’s will, there are some requests we just won’t make.

2. (vs. 23). John continues to say here “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.” In the previous verse, John declared that answered prayer was dependent upon keeping God’s commandments. But in this verse, he summarized God’s commandments in the previous verse into one “commandment.” There are two aspects to the commandment that John gives. First, “That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.” In the Bible, a person’s “name” stands for their character. It represents who they really are. Therefore, we are to believe not only in Jesus’ words, but also in His very person as the “Son” of God. Moreover, to believe “in the name” means to pattern one’s life after Jesus’ life to become more like Him. If we are living like Christ, then we will be able to demonstrate the second aspect of the “commandment” which John said was to “love one another, as he gave us commandment.” What’s important here is that we can’t accomplish one without doing the other. In other words, we can’t love one another as God has commanded us without believing in Jesus Christ, God’s Son.
D. The agent of confidence (I John 3:24). In our final verse John wrote “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 statement “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him” means that the person who obeys God’s words by living the obedient life of love abides in God and God abides in him (see John 15:1-7). John then tells us how we know that we have this special union with the Father. He said “we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” Scripture tells us that God’s “Spirit” has taken up residence in those who are redeemed (see Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 3:2). Note: The obedient believer dwells in God and God dwells in him or her by the Holy Spirit. Out of this intimate relationship will flow real acts of love and practical kindness. Living a godly life in an ungodly world requires an uncommon power that exceeds man’s own ability. Being aware of man’s inability to demonstrate divine love, Jesus prayed to the Father to send the “Holy Spirit,” our Comforter and teacher to be God’s continual presence with us and making plain God’s good pleasure. Although the “Holy Spirit” lives in the Christian, it’s possible to grieve Him (see Ephesians 4:30) and quench or cut off His power (see I Thessalonians 5:19) in our lives. The evidence that the “Holy Spirit” is in our lives is when we demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). And one fruit or characteristic of the “Holy Spirit” is love.
VI. Conclusion. Love is basic to Christian doctrine. If a person truly has passed from darkness into the light of salvation, he or she will practice love in their dealings with others. If love is real in a person’s life, it will be expressed self-sacrificially in practical ways. God’s commandment is that we believe in Christ and love one another. Confidence and assurance comes to us as we obey the LORD.

***The International Sunday School Lesson Curriculum***