

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST JOHN

### LOVE IN ACTION!

Read 1 John 3:16-24

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter and in verses 11 through 24. Here, John focuses on love for one another (1 John 3:11). This passage consists of three main parts. Verses 11 through 15 focus on the love believers should have for one another as we studied in last lesson. Verses 16 through 18 describe loving one another by our actions. Verses 19 through 24 discuss whether our hearts condemn us or not. First John 3:21 notes, *"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God."* When we have confessed our sins and abide (remain) in Christ, we can ask for anything according to His will and receive it (1 John 3:22).

The final two verses also offer an important reminder. John again focuses on love for God through Jesus as well as loving one another, offering teaching closely similar to the Great Commandment in Matthew 22:37–40. These verses also highlight the triune nature of God. John mentions God twice in verse 24, the Son Jesus Christ in verse 23, and the Spirit in verse 24. All three persons of the triune Godhead are distinct yet serve in perfect community as the one true God.

#### **Laying Down Our Lives for Our Brothers**

*"By this we know love because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."* (v16)

*"Know love"*! What is love? How we define love is important. If we define love the wrong way, then everyone passes, or no one passes, the love test. To understand the Biblical idea of love, we should begin by understanding the vocabulary of love among the ancient Greeks, who gave us the original language of the New Testament.

- Eros was one word for love. It described, as we might guess from the word itself, erotic love. It referred to sexual love.
- Storge was the second word for love. It referred to family love, the kind of love there is between a parent and child, or between family members in general.
- Philia is the third word for love. It spoke of brotherly friendship and affection. It is the love of deep friendship and partnership. Philia love might be described as the highest love that one is capable of without God's help.
- Agape is the fourth word for love. It described a love that loves without changing. It is a self-giving love that gives without demanding or expecting re-payment. It is love so great that it can be given to the unlovable or unappealing. It is love that loves even when it is rejected. Agape love gives and loves because it wants to; it does not demand or expect repayment from the love given — it gives because it loves, it does not love in order to receive.

Real love isn't merely "felt" as an inward feeling; it is also shown by demonstration — and the ultimate demonstration was the giving of Jesus on the cross. The exact same idea was expressed by Paul in Romans 5:8: *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

It isn't the death of Jesus in itself that is the ultimate demonstration of love; it is the death of Jesus together with what it does for us that shows the epitome of love. If I am on a pier, and a man jumps in the water and drowns, and cries out with his last breath, "I'm giving my life for you!" I cannot really

comprehend that act as an act of love — it just seems strange. But if that same man jumps in the water to save me from drowning, and gives his own life that I may survive, then I can fully understand how the giving of his life was a great act of love.

There is a real sense in which we would not know what love was all about if not for the work of Jesus on the cross. We have an innate ability to pervert the true meaning of love and pursue all kinds of things under the guise of looking for love.

Since we are sent with the same mandate Jesus was sent with, we must demonstrate our love by laying down our lives for the brethren. Jesus' words "*As the Father sent Me, I also send you*" (John 20:21) seem to be ringing in John's ears. **We also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** The focus here is on loving the brethren. Of course, we are also called to love our enemies and those who hate us (Matthew 5:44), but John calls us to a more basic test — if we can't even love our brethren, what kind of Christians are we?

### Love Requires Acts of Compassion

*"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."* (vv17-18)

John will not allow us to merely talk about love; real love is demonstrated in actions (though it is also often evident in our feelings). If you have the capability to meet a brother's needs, and do nothing to meet those needs, then how can you say you love that brother? How does the love of God abide in you?

We're so afraid that people will take advantage of us or scam us that we try to suppress our compassion. Certainly, we need to be wise. But we must give out if God has given to us. This is the most natural thing that love can do. This is loving "with actions and in deed" (3:18). What is the limit to this kind of love? The only limit is the one that love itself imposes. When giving to a person, if meeting his perceived or immediate need, does him harm instead of good — then the loving thing to do is to not give him what he asks for, but to instead give him what he really needs.

### Love Assures

*"And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."* (vv19-20)

When we see this love at work in our lives, we can know that we are of the truth — and this brings assurance to our hearts before God, that we are standing in Him. Assurance is essential — who wants to wait until it is too late to know if they are really saved or not?

Our assurance is two-fold. First, God already knows everything about you, and He loves you, He cares for you, He desires you; second, God knows all things, and knows who we truly are in Jesus Christ. If we are born again, then the real self is the one created in the image of Jesus Christ.

But what if we have been walking in love, yet our heart still condemns us before God? John assures us that God is greater than our heart, and so reminds us that we cannot base our relationship with Him purely on how we feel in His presence. Condemnation can well up inside us that has nothing to do with our standing before God. It may be the work of the enemy of our souls (who, according to Revelation 12:10 accuses the brethren), or the work of an over-active conscience. At those times, we trust in what God's Word says about our standing, not how we feel about it.

## The Blessings of a Confident Heart

*“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” (vv21-22)*

Yet, when we are in fellowship with God, and our heart does not condemn us, we know that we can have confidence toward God and our standing with Him. If someone is in true fellowship with God — not deceiving oneself, as mentioned in 1 John 1:6 — then the assurance that comes to his heart while fellowshiping with God is a precious thing. It is what Paul spoke about in Romans 8:16 — The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

How precious is the confidence we can have in Jesus Christ! There is such a thing as a false confidence, a confidence in self or in illusions; but there is also a glorious confidence we can have in Jesus. “The word rendered confidence stood in ancient Greece for the most valued right of a citizen of a free state, the right to ‘speak his mind’... unhampered by fear or shame.”

### Obedience and Answered Prayer

*“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” (v22)*

Do we receive answers to prayer because of our obedience? That's what St. John is saying. In contrast to the heretics, who had disconnected obedience and righteous living from their religion, John underscores the importance of holy living.

Is this contrary to grace? No. We know that God doesn't "owe" us anything. Our salvation is entirely by grace. But our continued Christian life requires our participation with God's grace.

If one of your children had been petulant and disobedient, would you be inclined to grant his requests? No, that would only encourage his rebellion. Parents usually grant non-essential requests only if the child is obedient. Grace maintains our relationship as children of our heavenly Parent. But for answers to our extra requests, obedient living is required. That's part of wise child-rearing.

### Believe and Love

*“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. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” (vv23-24)*

The idea of keeping His commandments in the previous verse led John to speak specifically about what His commandment is. Simply, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another. Here, John does not refer to these two aspects of obedience as two commandments, but as one commandment. Grammatically, he may not be officially correct, but spiritually, he is right on. These two are one. When Jesus spoke of the greatest commandment: *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, He added another saying: And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).* There are two commandments, but they are clearly like one another.

Again, John seems to have quoted Jesus' idea from John 6:29: This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent. The first commandment and the greatest work we can do, is to believe on Jesus. This is not simply believing that Jesus is, or even believing that He did certain things such as die on a cross.

To believe on the name of Jesus means to put your belief on Jesus in the sense of trusting in Him, relying on Him, and clinging to Jesus. It isn't about intellectual knowledge or understanding, it is about trust.

The second commandment is also a quoting of Jesus' idea from John 15:12: *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* The love of the brethren is not an option for some Christians; it is a commandment for all.

Those who abide in Jesus know they are abiding in Jesus, because of the presence and assurance of the Holy Spirit. John again is giving the same idea as Romans 8:16 (*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*). Romans 8:9 tells us that anyone who belongs to Jesus has the Spirit in him; that indwelling Holy Spirit gives us assurance. You can't be abiding in Jesus and not know it, though you may be attacked with doubt from time to time.

The one who does not keep God's commandments does not have the ground of confidence that he abides in Jesus. Also, he does not truly have the assurance of the Holy Spirit's presence in his life.