

5. 1 John 3:11-24 of a Verse by Verse Study of the Letters of John and Jude

The first section of 1 John 3 discussed how great God's love is toward us that we may be called children of God. The section continues to elaborate on how there are children of God and children of the devil. In 1 John 3:10, John concludes that section by saying:

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

To be a child of God, one must do what is right and love his brother. The stage is set for the next section, where John adds detail to this premise of doing what is right and loving our brothers.

The Message from the Beginning: Love One Another

11 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, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

That we should love one another is a message that they had heard from the beginning. John had first learned this lesson of love from the Lord in John 13:34-35, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In John 15:12, Jesus had also taught, "12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Loving our brothers is our very own litmus test to prove that we have passed from death into life. When, in Rom 6:3:5, we are raised from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life, we know that we have life if we love our brothers. "Anyone who does not love remains in death," John teaches in verse 14.

Hate such as Cain had led to the murder of Abel. That hate demonstrated that Cain belonged to the evil one. We must not be like Cain.

When John says, "15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer," he could be referring to the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:21-22:

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

The conclusion to this section, "You know that no murderer has eternal life in him," repeats emphatically in the Revelation recorded by John in Rev 21:7-8:

7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God, Who Knows Our Hearts

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. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. 19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Christ taught this relationship between love and laying down one's life in John 15:13, "13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Not only should we be willing to lay our lives down, but we must be willing to share with our needy brothers. It takes more than words to be a child of God; it takes actions and truth. Jesus had said in John 17:17, "17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." We know that we belong to the truth if we love with action and deeds, doing the Lord's commands. This is also how we set our hearts at rest before the presence of God. We search our hearts and know that we are fulfilling the truth of God, revealed by His Spirit. Whether or not we are right in our hearts, God knows, for he knows everything. We set our hearts at rest by doing his will and by loving the brothers. If we have sinned, we follow his teaching in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

The Spirit by Whom We Know that God Lives in Us

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 obey 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 Those who obey his commands live 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.

Since we have Jesus as the atoning sacrifice, our hearts need not condemn us before God. John has already told us this in 1 John 2:1-2:

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Therefore, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him anything we ask, if we obey his commands and do what pleases him. John states two broad and all-inclusive commands: believe in the name of Jesus and love one another. These commands mark the obedient spirit of the child of God. When we follow these commands in all that we do, we live in the Lord and he lives in us. Paul had written in 2 Cor 5:17-18, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."

We know that we are children of God, that the Lord is in us, and that neither he nor our hearts condemn us by the Spirit that he gave us. Peter announced the promise of this Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38-39: "38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the **gift of the Holy Spirit.**" Paul repeated this promise in Eph 1:13-14, adding that the Holy Spirit guaranteed our inheritance:

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

In Eph 6:17-18, Paul taught that the word of God was the instrument by which the word acts, "17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." In Rom 8:16, Paul teaches that the spirit testifies to our spirits, "16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." When John says, "We know it by the Spirit he gave us," he is speaking of this same testimony of the Spirit. It is important that we understand that the form of this testimony is the word of God. Two examples are important here: One from the Hebrew letter, and the other from the Revelation.

In Hebrews, the writer repeatedly states, "The Spirit says." In every case, what he quotes or refers to is the word of God, as in Heb 9:8: "8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing." Heb 3:7-8 reads:

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says:
"Today, if you hear his voice,
8 do not harden your hearts
as you did in the rebellion,

In Heb 10:15-16, we read, "15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 "This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds."

The way that the Lord speaks is through the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. Heb 4:12-13 teaches:

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

In the Revelation, we learn that Christ himself speaks through the Spirit. In Rev 2:7, Christ speaks but says that it is the Holy Spirit who speaks. He said, "7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This same Spirit speaks to the churches today through the word of God in the New Testament. Christ holds the double-edged sword of the Holy Spirit in Rev 2:12, "These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword."

Do you want to know that Christ lives in you? You can know by the Spirit that he gave you who testifies to you in the word of God, recorded in the New Testament.