

By This We Know

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[0:00] We're back in 1 John tonight. Remember that two lessons ago in our study of 1 John we started working our way through a longer section of the book.

And that's from verses 4 through 24 of 1 John 3. The primary aim of this section is to combat the false teachers who are corrupting the fundamentals of the faith.

So these verses further amplify and reiterate what we've already looked at in the test that John has presented for us. Just for review, verses 4 through 10 convey that genuine believers practice righteousness, while verses 11 through 24 relate that genuine believers practice love toward fellow believers.

John was very concerned that Christians know how to tell the true from the false, the genuine from the artificial, and true believers from false ones. So he presents some tests here that help determine the validity of anybody's claims to be a Christian.

1 John 3.10 is the key verse that ties the two sections together. And 1 John 3.10 says, In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest.

[1:14] 1 John 3.10 says, 1 John 4.10 says,

John 3.10 says,

We see that right off the bat. He says, by this we know love. By this we know love. We've already talked about how Jesus gave the command to love a new standard.

Jesus said the new standard is to love as Jesus loved us. And if we need any reminder of how Jesus loved us, we get that in the very first sentence of verse 16.

That says, by this we know love because he laid down his life for us. We talked about how the verb know emphasizes a historical encounter with Christ that has ongoing results that affect our present lives.

[7:27] And John's knowledge of this nature of love was made known at Calvary, but it's a love in which he continually grows and develops as a child with God. The expression, he laid down his life for us, occurs only here in 1 John, but it's a common phrase in John's gospel.

When John says laid down, that refers to a deliberate, willful act that demonstrated Christ's love for us. Because Christ's act was an atonement, it was a designed self-sacrifice on the behalf of others.

And John's primary concern is to stress the exemplary aspects of Christ's sacrifice. One commentator put it this way. He said, One's life is an individual's most precious possession.

Christ's willingness to lay down that life on behalf of others constituted the greatest possible expression of love. Jesus' expression of love becomes a measuring stick for every expression of love.

And Christian love is self-sacrificing and giving. Christ giving up his life for believers epitomized the true nature of Christian love. If John had stopped there, we probably would like 1 John 3.16 even more than we do.

[8:42] But in the next sentence of verse 16, John calls us to action based upon Christ's love. Look at that second sentence of verse 16 again. It says, Jesus' path to the cross marked selfless, self-giving way of life, to which his followers are also called.

We ought there is more emphatic than it sounds in the English because it accentuates the fact that just like Jesus, we should lay down our lives for the brethren if necessary.

So John's point is that Christians have an obligation to follow the example of the Lord even unto death as such an occasion presents itself. When the honor of God's name, the advancement of his church, and the need of his people demand that we love our brothers, we ought to show our love at all costs, even to the point of risking our own lives.

In the middle of the Bible Belt, though, few if any of us will probably be called to lay down our lives for another Christian. John and the Holy Spirit anticipated similar situations for most of John's readers, and with that rhetorical question in verse 17, John moves to a more practical everyday scenario to emphasize the type of love that he describes.

Verse 17 says, 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? What's the answer to John's question there?

[10:14] Genuine Christian love expresses itself in sacrificial giving to other Christians' needs. That's why he talks about his brother. So it's a practical love that finds motivation in helping others.

Where motivation to help others does not exist, it's questionable whether God's love is really present. And then, of course, it's also questionable whether the person is really the Lord's child. John's thought in verse 17 progresses through the use of three coordinated verbs. So we'll look at those. The first two are in the present tense, and they express the responsibility of the child of God. He has the means to meet the need, and he sees the need. And the third verb reveals the unwillingness to fulfill that need. With the first verb, the picture is someone who possesses enough material goods to maintain life in the present world.

So he has the means necessary to meet another's need. And then introduces the second element of this negative example. He not only has the means to meet the need, but he actually sees the need.

[11:21] The verb translated sees there is more than just a casual passing glance. Instead, the term is a continual contemplative observation in which the person who does the seeing pauses to appreciate and understand the circumstances.

So when it says he sees his brother in need, it's not that he just happens to see somebody there and wonders if the person might need something. He actually can tell, and he knows, that the person needs something.

So two sentences I read there are really crucial to understanding what John means. The verb sees is more than just a casual passing glance. Instead, it's a continual contemplating observation in which the beholder pauses to appreciate and understand the circumstances of the case.

So let's notice something else about verses 16 and 17. Look at the pronouns in each verse. The pronouns in verse 16 are plural.

You see that John uses we and us. And some translations, like the New King James, also insert the implied R into verse 16. Even brethren there is plural.

[12:32] But then if you look at verse 17, the pronouns in verse 17 are singular. John uses his and him, and he also switches from brethren to brother when he says, 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?

This change from plural in verse 16 to singular here is deliberate and significant. It makes the duty of the fellow member of the Christian community more individualized in its application because it's easier to be enthusiastic about humanity with a capital H than it is to love individual men and women, especially those we might find uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive.

So loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular. I put that quote in your handout, but think about that last line again.

The statement that loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular is rather hard-hitting. But it really fits with what John is trying to get across here because he uses a verb that's translated shuts up, and that suggests a deliberate neglect in spite of what a person has observed.

The verb literally means to close or lock a door. So it's employed figuratively here to portray the construction of a barrier that encloses sympathetic feelings and isolates them from the needs of another.

[14:06] So really what he's saying is that we see the need, and if we don't meet it, we slam the door in the face of that person who has that need. Then in verse 18, John summarizes his exhortation of how to show love to a fellow believer in need.

He says, In today's vernacular, we might paraphrase it as actions speak louder than words, or maybe even put your money where your mouth is.

What he's really saying there is that self-sacrificing love is required of us as believers. We may not have to give our lives for someone, but certainly we'll all have opportunities to give of our material goods and our time for others, and Christian love is a relationship.

John's been talking about taking action for a few verses now. Based upon that, we might have expected him to just write the verse as, My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed.

Instead, John says that we are to love in deed and in truth. The quality of truth there is added because even actions can be hypocritical.

[15 : 27] John's challenge in this section, then, is for us to be genuine in our love. We not only take action, but we sincerely want to benefit the person that we're acting for. So this section started out very easy with the first sentence of verse 16, but you can see John's challenge to demonstrate Christ-like love to others is very convicting.

If John were the only biblical writer to issue that challenge, we might be able to dismiss it because maybe we could say the Son of Thunder had gone soft and after all, he's better known as the Apostle of Love, so maybe he's just gone kind of sentimental in his old age.

But other Bible authors issued the same command. Remember James 2, verses 14 through 17.

That's where James wrote, What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can faith save him? If a brother or a sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warm and be filled, that you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. That sounds very John-like, doesn't it, when you read those verses? Do you think they had the same person teach them?

[16 : 46] And of course we know that they did. Then Paul wrote this command, or this verse, in 1 Timothy 6, 17 through 19. So 1 Timothy 6, 17 through 19 is where Paul wrote, Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Let them do good, that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Paul may also have written this verse in Hebrews, Hebrews 13, 16. Hebrews 13, 16. But do not forget to do good, and to share, for with such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

We know also from Acts 2, 44, that the early church modeled good deeds. Listen to Acts 2, 44 and 45. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Moving on now to the second section of the study, verses 19 through 23, have the second occurrence of the phrase, By this we know. This time we see that by this we know, we are of the truth.

[18 : 14] By this we know that we are of the truth. Even though we're breaking the verses into sections, the verses still relate to the importance of love. Look at 19 through 23 again.

John wrote, 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.

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.

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. To understand this passage, we need to know what John means by two key phrases.

The first is, by this, and the second is, of the truth. In verse 19, this refers to demonstrating love by our actions.

[19 : 16] So this goes back to demonstrating our love by our actions again. Just like we said previously, self-sacrificial active love offers evidence that one is of the truth.

Now that we know the reference for the word this, we need to figure out what John means by of the truth. Of the truth here means being identified with him who is the truth.

Who is that truth? Absolutely, Jesus is that truth. John is using a designation for Jesus that John no doubt heard Jesus himself use.

He wrote this verse in John 14, 6, and that's when Jesus told Thomas, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me. John could have written 1 John 3, 19 as, and by demonstrating love for the brethren, we know that we are of Jesus, and shall assure our hearts before him.

So God knows those who are truly his, and he wants to assure his own of their salvation. And we can be assured of the presence of eternal life within us, when we demonstrate self-sacrificial love to others.

[20 : 29] Believers who begin to truly love, will know that their behavior has source, in the truth. The end of verse 19 says that we assure our hearts before him, and before him there recalls 1 John 2, 28 and 29, and it refers to the Christian's appearance before the judgment seat of Christ.

A few weeks ago, when we looked at 2, 28, we saw, this is where John said, and now little children abide in him, that when he appears, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

Going back to tonight's text, let's look at 3.20 now. 3.20 says, For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

If you felt convicted by verses 16 through 18, verse 20 is for you here. And if you didn't feel convicted by verses 16 through 18, maybe you should go back and read them again.

But if you did feel convicted, this is for you. Our conscience may not acknowledge the loving deeds we've done in the power of the Holy Spirit, but God does, and he's superior to our heart.

[21 : 38] Unlike our conscience, God takes everything into account when he looks at us, including Christ's atoning work for us. So God is often more compassionate and understanding toward us than we sometimes are toward ourselves.

We know that in our desire to live the lives of high moral character and show good deeds toward others will sometimes fail and will fall short even of our own ideals, let alone what God has for us. And when this happens, our hearts may condemn us, but we can rest in his presence because God knows everything. He knows that we believe in Christ and that we strive to love our brothers and that we regret falling short.

So God does not look only at the outer facts of the imperfect love we show, but at the inner fact of having been born of God. That's where we need to remember that the human heart's not the final standard.

Rather, God is the final standard, and it's God's power that keeps us secure in him. God's power and steadfastness, not our own, is what gives us security.

[22 : 43] So God's omniscience strengthens and encourages us, but it also challenges us because we know that God knows everything and he will require an accounting of the service that we've done on his behalf.

So check out verses 21 and 22 now. That's where John wrote, 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.

John goes back to one of his favorite addresses there when he uses the personal address, Beloved, and that expresses his concern for the readers who've experienced the struggle of a condemning heart.

It's a reminder that they know the love of God, and that love of God should serve to comfort them. In keeping with his practice of placing positive and negative statements back to back, verse 21 deals with the uncondemning heart, and it contrasts the thought of the previous verse which addresses the heart that does condemn.

Confidence before God, then, results from a non-condemning heart and provides motivation in prayer. The term confidence there means boldness, a freedom of speech, and a frankness such as a child has in approaching his father.

[24 : 04] So confidence is what goes in that blank there. Confidence means boldness, a freedom of speech, and a frankness like a child would have in approaching his father. The confidence and boldness contain nothing of impropriety or brashness.

This confidence gives no license to anyone to command God to act. It does not erase the distinction between God's infinity and our humanity. Instead, our confidence rests in his mercy and love which has been extended to us.

We always have to keep that last sentence in mind. Once again, it says, our confidence rests in God's mercy and love which have been extended to us. So now we come to verse 22, and again, verse 22 says, whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

The and that starts verse 22 seems to explain the immediately preceding statement. And if so, our confident fellowship with God is accompanied with a guarantee of answered prayer, but we need to dig into that a little bit more.

You know, when we look at it, the clause, whatever we ask, is all inclusive, and it leaves open both the content and the occasion for the request. But at the same time, we have to consider the context. [25 : 28] The immediate context suggests that the person asking is the one who is striving to obey his commands and do what pleases God. We get that, of course, from the last half of verse 22.

And then later on in 1 John, we'll see that 1 John 5, 14, and 15 state that the prayer is to be offered according to God's will. Both we ask and we receive there are present tense verbs.

John Stott points out that receiving the answer to prayers is the Christian's typical experience because the verbs are in the present tense. The conditions, though, along with the verb tense suggest that John doesn't intend that we have a blank check there for every prayer, but instead that answered prayer is the ongoing experience of the Christian.

In other words, we see that more often than not. We have to keep in mind that even Jesus' request that the cup of crucifixion pass from him was not answered affirmatively.

But we should observe, though, that Jesus' request was followed by the statement, Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. When John says that we receive from him anything we ask, we have to understand that he speaks of the ideal.

[26 : 44] It's not that God becomes our bellhop, but rather, our requests fall more and more in line with what God wants for us anyway. And when we do that, we fall in line with God's will, and the underlying assumption is always that the requests coincide with God's will.

And here, John makes this even more explicit than some other passages because he states the condition we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

When John references commands, those appear to be explicit demands of God's will. The things that please him, then, are spontaneous acts that are motivated by love and a desire to bring him honor above the specified commands.

A believer should desire to please him and bring glory to him in all manner of life and obedience.

Matthew Henry says, So one more time, listen to that.

Obedient souls are prepared for blessings and they have promise of audience. Those who commit things displeasing to God cannot expect that he should please them in hearing and answering their prayers.

[28 : 02] Then, for clarity's sake, so that we know what the commandment is, when John refers to commandments, he says it again in verse 23 and that commandment has two parts.

Listen to verse 23 one more time. John says, And this is the commandment that we should believe on the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment.

So it's pretty clear from that, isn't it? We must believe in Jesus and love one another and these two ideas stem from the same attitude of heart. So John sees them as one command.

The command to believe on the name of his son, Jesus Christ, actually contains the first occurrence of the verb believe in the letter. John here seems to be pointing to the initial act of placing faith in Jesus Christ.

So it's a personal identification with all that the bearer of the name entails. To believe on the name of his son, Jesus Christ, is to place our faith in all that Jesus is.

[29 : 04] His son emphasizes the deity and unique sonship of Jesus. We know that Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means the Lord is salvation.

It is the human name that he was given at birth, and it identifies him as being totally human. And then Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah, and affirms his role as the Old Testament Messiah.

That double designation in Jesus Christ actually represents the earliest of Christian confessions. To believe in the name of Jesus Christ is to place our faith and trust in him and all that he is.

Of course, that means he's the divine son, the incarnate God, but he's also the sinless human who's the messianic savior in all the other aspects of his unique nature and personhood.

The second piece of the dual command here is to love one another as he gave us commandment. And John uses the present tense in his command to love, which reminds us that the practice of Christian love should be a daily continual expression.

[30:08] The reciprocal pronoun there, one another, demands that love must be mutually displayed by members of the family of God. And he adds the words as he gave us commandment, and those words make clear what is required in exact conformity to the demands of Jesus.

And to be a child of God is to love one another as Jesus has loved us. And John insists that both faith and love are a central test for the true child of God. Right belief and right action support the authenticity of someone's faith.

So we've seen by this we know love and by this we know that we are of the truth. We have one more occurrence of by this we know in tonight's passage. And in verse 24 we see by this we know that he abides in us.

By this we know that he abides in us. The full verse 24 says, 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. John goes back to the same thought that he had in verse 22, and that's keeping God's commandments.

[31:21] And then it also prepares us for what will follow in chapter 4 when he starts talking about testing the spirits. But here John introduces a mutual abiding relationship for someone who obeys these commands.

Someone who characteristically lives in obedience experiences a reciprocal fellowship with God.

And the present tense of abides indicates a close and permanent relationship.

relationship and it's a relationship between the child of God and the Heavenly Father. The primary evidence of our mutual abiding experience in God is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the source from which the certainty of our relationship with God is drawn. The

past tense translated he has given us there looks to the moment when the Spirit was given.

so he has given us looks to the moment when the Spirit was given and it points to the instant when the Spirit is given to each believer at the time of regeneration.

[32:25] That indwelling of the Spirit also ties to John's emphasis on love and it shows itself by the power that it provides us to obey God's commands to love one another and by the conviction it gives us to confess our faith in Jesus.

As usual in 1 John the application of this passage is pretty straightforward. First we are to love other Christians as Christ has loved us.

So we are to love other Christians as Christ has loved us. Second true Christian love provides assurance of salvation.

True Christian love provides assurance of salvation. and I think it is a blessing for us that God does want us to be assured of our salvation.

He gives us ways to see that we are saved and most of these ways are summarized here in 1 John.

Then third true Christian love and obedience is a condition for answered prayer.

[33:31] True Christian love and obedience is a condition for answered prayer. prayer. And finally the Holy Spirit within us bears witness that we are in Christ.

So the Holy Spirit within us bears witness that we are in Christ. That's why John can write by this we know love because Jesus laid down his life for us and this is God's commandment that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another as he gave us commandment.