

Handout: 1 John Lesson 3

The grace of our Creator is so great that he has allowed us both to know him and to love him, and moreover, to love him as children love a wonderful father. It would be no small thing if we were able to love God in the way that a servant loves his master or a worker his employer. But a living God as father is much greater still.

St. Bede, *On 1 John*

Those “born again” or “born from above” in the Sacrament of Baptism are no longer merely children in the family of Adam; they become children in the family of God. The destiny of those blessed in this way is to receive:

1. The love and protection of God as their divine Father (Jn 16:27; 17:15).
2. The empowerment to share God's love with others (1 Jn 3:16-18; Jn 13:34) as Jesus taught us.
3. The encouragement to share our hopes and fears with the Father through Christ for His intervention in our lives (Lk 11:1-14; Jn 14:2-3).
4. The inheritance of eternal life as co-heirs of Christ. Jesus is the “only begotten Son” of the Father by nature (Jn 1:18; 3:16; 1 Jn 4:9), but the baptized are born of God by grace (1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4).

3:2-3, Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

John promises two blessings in verses 2-3 for children of God at the end of their earthly lives:

1. We will see God as He is in His true nature and substance.
2. We will become holy and divine as He is holy and divine.

3:6-10, No one who remains in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or knowns him. 7 Children, let no one deceive you. The person who acts in righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 Whoever sins belongs to the devil because the devil has sinned from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is begotten by God commits sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he is begotten by God. 10 In this way, the children of God and the children of the devil are made plain; no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God, nor anyone who does not love his brother.

1 John 4:6-9 is a preface to verse 10 where John gives a summary of the criteria for:

1. distinguishing the children of God from the children of the devil
2. the practice of Christian virtues
3. keeping God's commandments especially in loving one's brothers and sisters in the covenant community and the human family

In 3:11, John writes: *For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: we should love one another.* The message of God's sacred word is unaltered and is not contradictory. From the beginning of the observance of Mosaic Law that the children of Israel received at Mount Sinai, God commanded them to love Him and act with love toward one another:

- Leviticus 19:18 ~ *Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD [Yahweh].*
- Deuteronomy 6:5 ~ *Therefore, you shall love the LORD [Yahweh], your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

Deuteronomy 6:5 is the basic principle of the whole of Mosaic Law that since Yahweh alone is God, we should love Him with an undivided heart. Jesus cited the love of God as the greatest and first commandment that embraced the whole of Mosaic Law (Mt 22:37). In the same passage, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18 as the second of the two greatest commandments (Mt 22:39). However, in Leviticus, “neighbor” was restricted to “countrymen,” but Jesus expanded its meaning to include everyone, even enemies and those who persecute us (see Lk 10:29-37 and Mt 5:43).

John writes about reassuring our hearts in 3:19. Commentators suggest two interpretations:

1. Despite the just condemnation that comes from our hearts/conscience, convicting us of our transgressions, God’s mercy in Christ is greater than our sins. And, if we are striving to be obedient to resist sin and living in obedience to the Law of love, we can stand before Him in confidence.

2. Or, John may be saying, whenever our hearts/consciences/feelings falsely condemn us, our love for our brothers and sisters is evidence that we are still in good standing in our relationship with God.

The difference between the two interpretations is whether our “hearts” are telling us something that is accurate or if we are overly scrupulous with ourselves concerning wrongdoing. The critical point is that God knows us better than we know ourselves, and His mercy is greater than our misgivings and our sins, giving us the confidence to trust Him with our lives (verse 20).

In 1 John 4:7-12, repeats Jesus’ teaching on love in the Gospel of John 15:9-17. In His Last Supper Discourse, Jesus told His disciples: *9 As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that your joy might be complete. 12 This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. [...] 16 It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, do that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. 17 This I command you: love one another.*

Notice the progression of “to love” that developed from the Gospel of John 15:9 and then expands in verses 12 and 17:

1. The Father loves Jesus (verse 9).
2. Jesus loves His disciples (verse 12).
3. The disciples must love one another (verse 17).

The key point in John 15:10 is that Jesus told the Apostles that they would remain in His love **IF** they kept His commandments, a theme the Letter of 1 John repeated in 3:21-24.

St. John revisits Jesus’ theme of love in 1 John 4:11-12: *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.* Take John’s advice and perfect your life by taking up the challenge to love as Christ loved! It is a command that has everlasting benefits.

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