

1 JOHN STUDY 4

This is the last of our studies following up the Sunday morning sermons in 1 John. This week are going to particularly look at the theme of loving one another.

This is an important application of all John is teaching - he repeats the command again and again throughout the letter. This is partly explained by the context of the letter. A group of people have left the church John is writing to, and seem to be very unloving towards those they have left. John is writing to expose them as false believers - he has taught that by showing that what they believe about Jesus is wrong, and now he says that they are revealing their spiritual condition by their lack of love.

Although the theme of love comes up throughout the letter we are going to restrict our focus to two key passages - although feel free to bring in other verses as you go along if you see fit, and encourage the group to do the same as they answer the questions.

3:10-18

The first extended section on love. In verse 10 John gives two key pieces of evidence for distinguishing true believers from unbelievers - lifestyle (practising righteousness) and love (love his brother, which means in particular love for fellow Christians). These do not save us, but they are the fruits of salvation.

John makes clear he isn't teaching anything new or radical (vs 11). They have heard this from the beginning. Jesus himself is insistent on the need to love, and has stated that this summarises the whole Old Testament law. The division John makes on the basis of love is also not new. Humanity is divided from Genesis 4 onwards between those who obey and love, and those who disobey and hate those who obey and love. The incident with Cain and Abel is played out again and again wherever Christians are, so we shouldn't be surprised at persecution. It may be tempting to think that hate is not a big sin, but it is the seed that murder (death) comes from, and as such can't be part of someone who belongs to Christ and has his life abide in him (vs 14-15).

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Verses 16 -18 are straightforward to read and understand, but hard to apply and live! The test of our love is how we act towards real, practical needs we see - particularly (though not exclusively) in the church. spend some time in the study talking about this - don't settle for easy or vague responses.

4:7-12

Again, John emphasises that love is the fruit of the new birth which comes from knowing God. Why is that the case? Because of who God is. He is "love". Everything God does is loving. He is "love" in his very being, as he exists as one God in a triune fellowship of love. But we don't have to guess at what it means for God to be love - he has shown us (vs 9) in a very costly way. He sent his son to bear the wrath we deserve so we may know him eternally (live through him). His love came first, before our love for him. His love is the pattern for our love for others - and when we think about all it entailed our eyes are opened to what true love looks like. As we love we show to each other and to the world who God is like.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

3:10-18

What evidence does John point us to, to distinguish between the children of God and the children of the devil?

How does John show us that he is not teaching anything new (vs 11-12)

How do we continue to see the pattern of Cain and Abel work itself out in history?

What should our love look like? Why? How might we apply vs 17-18 to our lives today/

4:7-12

Why is love such an important mark of the Christian? (vs 7)

What does "'God is love" mean? (vs 8)

How has God shown us his love? Think through each aspect of verses 9 and 10? How does this teach us about what our love should look like?

The evangelist and pastor Francis Shaeffer once said that a Christians love is the ultimate apologetic, by which he meant that it should be the greatest evidence of the truth of the gospel. How does verse 12 show that?