



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for April 11, 2010
Released on Wednesday, April 7, 2010**

“Living in the Light of Love”

Lesson Text: 1 John 2:9-11, 15-17

Background Scripture: 1 John 2:7-17

Devotional Reading: John 13:31-35

1 John 2:9-11, 15-17

9 He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

10 He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11 But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

.....
15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to see what John tells us about walking in the light.

Principle: to affirm that true Christians love others around them.

Application: to show that if we say we walk in the light, we must love our brother.

INTRODUCTION

Famous Landmarks

What is the quickest way to identify a great city? Almost everyone knows that Paris is the home of the Eiffel Tower. Rome has its Coliseum; London has Big Ben and the Tower Bridge; Moscow has the Kremlin. Around the world, many cities have landmarks by which they are recognized. Even small towns and villages often have unique features that give them a special identity.

Other cities are famous for what happens there. Los Angeles makes movies; Cannes has its annual film festival; New Orleans has Mardi Gras. Even if it is only Apple-Butter Makin’ Days or the Mid-Winter Ice Fishing Festival, communities identify themselves in distinctive ways.

So what is it that identifies the Christian community (the church) as such? What is the landmark that makes us recognizable to the world? It is our loyalty to Christ, of course, but that is not all. Jesus himself said, “By this shall all men know that ye are

my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Therefore, an identifying landmark in the church is love.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: about A.D. 90-95

Place: probably from Ephesus

John the son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19) is usually credited with writing the gospel and the three epistles that bear his name. While the Gospel of John seeks to bring the reader to faith (John 20:31), the first epistle of John seeks to confirm the reader in that faith or that he/she may "know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). John also writes to combat a deviant form of Christianity (Gnosticism) which asserted knowledge as the means of salvation.

When the Apostle John and his brother James left their nets to follow Jesus, they were not yet at the point of embracing the kind of love that Jesus was teaching. For instance, on one occasion they voiced hostility toward certain Samaritans, even offering to call down fire from Heaven to destroy them (Luke 9:54). On another occasion, those two tried to get ahead of their fellow apostles by asking for the choicest seats in the coming kingdom (Mark 10:35-41). John was not learning his lesson of love very well when he showed such hostility and selfishness!

Yet we have come to know John as "the apostle of love." Once he finally accepted what Jesus was trying to teach him, he wrote expressive letters to teach these lessons to others. In 1 John, he sharply contrasts the life of love with the life of hatred or indifference. It is the contrast of light versus darkness, the contrast of living as children of God versus living as children of the world.

LOVE AS AN EVIDENCE OF GODLINESS (1 John 2:9-11)

1. What false teaching evoked John's emphasis on love in 1 John?

John wrote his first epistle to Christians near the end of the first century. By this time persecution seems to have subsided for a stretch, but false teaching had become a major threat. John's readers had to face an early form of a heresy called Gnosticism. This error, taught falsehoods about the Person of Christ. Gnostics denied His humanity because they believed a human body would have contaminated Him.

Another Gnostic error was a lack of love. Believing that they possessed a superior knowledge (*gnosis*), they set themselves apart as an elite class and despised all others. Gnostics believed it was their knowledge that gave them a special relationship with the God of pure spirit.

These false teachings necessitated John's special emphases in his letter. The incarnation of Christ, for example, is found several times (1 John 1:1; 2:22-23; 4:1-3; 5:20). But the emphasis on love as a mark of godliness is equally emphasized, as is evident in our text.

2. What is the spiritual condition of one who hates his brother? (1 John 2:9)

The love for one's brother is a test that reveals one's spiritual condition (1 John 2:9). A person may claim to be "in the light"—that is, walking with God—but hatred for his brother proves him to be otherwise. He is "in darkness even until now." An improper relationship with others revealed an improper relationship with God.

There is always the danger that God's people will pay only lip service to His commands. When people truly love God, however, they will necessarily demonstrate it in their lives. Warmed by the light of God's love and directed by the light of God's

Word, they will reflect God's love to those around them. But if someone hates *his brother*, he exposes the fact that he still lives *in darkness even until now*. The one who claims to walk in God's *light* and at the same time hates a brother or sister in the Lord should hear the warning of Jesus: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Jesus gave the command to love. To obey Him as Lord is to walk in His pattern of love. As it has often been said, one must "walk the walk, and not just talk the talk."

3. What kind of love does John call us to exhibit to one another? (v. 10)

There are three wonderful traits shown in the kind of person John wants us to be. First, such a person loves *his brother*. Because we have experienced God's love in our own lives, we are able to share it with everyone else in the church.

Second, such a person abides *in the light*. When we remain in God's light, which is symbolic of God's truth, we keep the command of God to love our neighbor. Third, there is no *occasion of stumbling in him*. This means that the one who abides in love does not become the cause of a fellow Christian tripping up spiritually.

4. What evidence of "darkness" might there be in the person who hates his brother? (v. 11)

To show the truth about love and light more clearly, John holds them up against the opposite. If a professing Christian (see v. 9) hates a *brother*, it produces an ugly situation. Such a person may claim to be—even believe himself or herself to be—in the light. But that person actually is living in the *darkness*. The failure to love exposes the fact that he or she does not truly know God and God's will.

Consequently, such a person does not know *whither he goeth*. Groping blindly in the darkness of ignorance, such a person is unaware of being completely off the path of the journey that God intends.

The darkness that blinds may come in various forms. Perhaps the person will be arrogant because of his or her social standing. Perhaps the person will be racist or hostile toward foreigners. However expressed, the inner darkness will cause him or her to withdraw or withhold love from certain ones of God's children. A failure to love all God's people proves that any claim of love for God himself is false.

LOVE AS AN EVIDENCE OF WORLDLINESS (1 John 2:15-17)

5. What is the "world" that John tells us not to love? How is love for the world incompatible to our love for God? (vs. 15)

Love is a beautiful thing. But it becomes distorted and ugly when it is turned toward evil. That is why John now warns his readers that they must *not* love either *the world* or *the things that are in the world*. In this context, *the world* is not merely the physical planet Earth, but all that characterizes the people of the fallen world in their sinful state. Just as we cannot serve two masters (see Matthew 6:24), we cannot *love the world* and love *the Father* at the same time.

This verse raises an important distinction in two different ways of loving the world. God loves the world (as in John 3:16) with the intention of saving and changing it from its fallen state. This is right and good. On the other hand, it is wrong to love the world as it is in its sinfulness. To love sinful things is to set oneself in opposition to God and all He represents.

6. What three motivating desires of the world does John define? (v. 16)

This verse makes it clear that it is not the created, physical world that is the issue. What is at issue, rather, is what *the world* stands for. John breaks this down into three broad concerns. First, John refers to the world in terms of *the lust of the flesh*. God is the one who created our bodies to have physical appetites. There are proper

ways to satisfy these appetites. But the world will tempt us to satisfy those appetites in sinful ways.

Second, John sounds a warning in terms of *the lust of the eyes*. This is the sin of greed or covetousness, wanting to possess various things we see. Third, that which is in the world includes the *pride of life*. This is the arrogance of the self-centered person, the one who cares only about self.

It is clear that the two lusts and this pride will distance a person from God. Like the rich fool who took pride in using his possessions on his appetites (see Luke 12:14–21), such a person thinks he or she has no need of the creator. In short, a person either can be in love with God or in love with the world, but not both.

Three Lusts (v. 16) Further Explained (Questions 7-9)

7. What is the lust of the flesh? How might it be manifested?

The first motivating desire is "the lust of the flesh." A lust is a passionate craving, in this case "of the flesh." Though some take "flesh" to mean the sinful nature, it seems better in this context to understand it as the physical body. John was speaking of the passionate desire to gratify the cravings of the body.

Our physical bodies are not evil, and God made them with legitimate needs and desires. He wants us to enjoy the pleasures our senses provide, but He has also given guidelines by which these desires can be kept from overwhelming us. When we violate these boundaries and make physical gratification the chief end of life, we are worldly.

We readily and properly identify illicit sexual practices with the lust of the flesh. But it can also include drunkenness, overeating, excessively pampering the body, consistent oversleeping, and a continual desire for thrills.

8. What is the lust of the eyes? At what point does the accumulation of wealth become worldly?

The second motivating desire of the world is "the lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16). This can be closely connected with the lust of the flesh, since it is possible to derive sinful pleasure merely from seeing things. That is why Jesus declared lustful looks to be just as evil as the act of adultery (Matt. 5:27-28). Surely the widespread addiction to pornography is an evidence of the lust of the eyes in our culture.

However, the lust of the eyes goes far beyond this. It often takes the form of craving the material things we see. We also know it as greed. Possessions are not wrong in themselves; God knows we need food, shelter, and clothing to survive. Yet it is easy to let accumulation of goods become our chief goal in life. At this point we become worldly. This deadly lust is so subtle in our affluent society that it is hard to escape its clutches.

The lust of the eyes manifests itself in unwise buying habits, excessive credit purchases, overwork to accumulate wealth, and reduction in our giving to God's work. It can also lead to stealing, manipulation of others, and even murder. No wonder Jesus spoke so often of some of the dangers of wealth, and Paul called the love of money the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10)!

9. What is the pride of life? How might it be manifested?

The third motivating desire of the world is "the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). The word for "pride" means "arrogance," "vainglory," or "pretension." This is the desire for recognition in others' eyes. It may arise out of appearance, wealth, position, race, or even religious pretensions. It is thinking more highly of oneself than one ought to think (Rom. 12:3). It was Satan's original sin, and it easily traps us as well.

The pride of life displays itself in personal boasting, excessive nationalism, racism, and economic and educational elitism. It is seen in anger or self-pity over insult or ridicule. It calls attention to oneself through excessive displays of wealth or dress and even ostentatious displays of humility! It attacks us when we least expect it.

10. Why is love of the world not just wicked but absurd? What is the better alternative? (v. 17)

To love the world is not only wicked, it is absurd. The one who loves the world should be aware of this fact: the world passes away. There is no lasting satisfaction in fulfilling the lust of the flesh. There is no permanent gain in securing the lust of the eyes. There is no real benefit that comes from pride in a life that will soon come to an end. None of the things the world strives for last; they are temporary by nature, and they do not satisfy even in this life. How much less value they have for eternity!

Since the world carries the seeds of its own destruction by opposing God, it will come to a pathetic end when Christ returns and establishes His kingdom. Even those lusts that seemed so important will have no meaning in the life to come, and those who committed themselves to them will perish with Satan (Rev. 20:10-15).

Only the person who does the will of God will abide forever. To trust God, love Him, and obey Him is to bind oneself to the eternal. We may find ourselves at odds with the existing order, but the joys of the eternal are worth the inconvenience (2 Cor. 4:18). The only lasting reward comes from doing the will of God. Only the person who serves the Father has assurance that what he or she is doing will have lasting, eternal significance. Those who devote themselves to doing the will of God will abide forever in the community of Heaven.

11. If an outsider observed your life for one week, what might he or she say are the identifying "landmarks" of your life in terms of your highest priorities? What adjustments do you need to make?

All of us probably would be grateful should an observer say that we exemplify in our daily lives the identifying mark of a Christian - love. In reality, the landmarks for many of us are work, material things, and self. The fact that these are our greatest priorities may be indicated by our use of time and money.

Loving *action* as a landmark of life is logically preceded by a loving *attitude*. Prevailing attitudes of frustration, anger, impatience, or indifference will need to be addressed. All of us have room to grow in the area of love.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** Sometimes the believer's actions speak louder than his words (1 John 2:9).
- 2.** Failing to practice what we preach will cause us and may cause others to stumble (v. 10).
- 3.** Willfully disobeying God's commands always leads to one's own harm and hurt (v. 11).
- 4.** True love for God always requires that Christians make some hard choices (v. 15).
- 5.** The ways of the world are usually incompatible with the ways of God (v. 16).
- 6.** Beware: today's choices may impact you for the rest of life and eternity (v. 17).

CONCLUSION

Famous for Love

From the earliest days of the church, God's people have been notable for their love. They sold property, shared belongings, and did whatever was necessary to be sure that everyone had what was needed (see Acts 2:44-46; 4:34-37). When widows needed food, they organized to feed them (see Acts 6:1-3). When the saints in Jerusalem faced severe famine years later, the Gentile believers were eager to help them in their need (see Acts 11:28-30). They did this even though they lived in poverty themselves (a later occasion in 2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

Through the centuries, the church repeatedly has taken the lead to care for the sick, provide for orphans and widows, and offer opportunities for education. Who else will care for the lepers? Who else will leave home and safety to carry good news to distant tribes? Who else will do such things but those who have felt the love of God?

Therefore it is incumbent on every local church to have the distinguishing mark of love. It is not the sign out front by which a church is known; rather, it is the demonstration of love. Since this is true, it is vital that every individual Christian ask himself or herself what specific act of love he or she should do. Where is the specific need that love can address? Where is the specific hurt that love can heal? Christian love will seek out those needs and move vigorously to meet them.

We are the community of God—the church—and we are known by our love!

PRAYER

Loving Father, forgive us for being too much concerned with this world. Show us how to love You with all our hearts and then to reflect Your love to the rest of the world. We pray in the name of Jesus, who showed us utmost love. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

There is victory in love.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our next lesson, "The Necessity of Love," we will see that love is crucial to living the Christian life. It is absolutely essential if we call ourselves Christians. Jesus shows us how we can do this in His conversation with a Pharisee who tried to trick Him. Study Matthew 5:17-20; 22:34-40.

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