

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 68

1 John Chapter 3:11-24

Open:

How easy is it to talk about Christian love and yet do nothing about it?

Introduction

The love for one another that was first introduced as a major theme in 2:7-11, and reintroduced at the end of 3:10, now becomes the primary topic. As before, it is contrasted with hatred; but here the contrast is more fully developed, continuing the pattern of dualistic oppositions from 2:28-3:10: love and hatred, self-sacrifice and murder, life and death, Jesus and Cain. Although these contrasts are presented in very general terms, the references to deceivers and false prophets in the surrounding material (3:7; 4:1) may suggest that the author had in mind the contrast between his party and the opponents as well.

Christian love is always "in mission." There is no love for God that is not coupled with love for people. However, "many Christians refuse to do anything because they can't do everything. Because they can't set the world on fire, they refuse to light a candle. Because they can't save the world, they refuse to save a single soul. Love is doing the little thing at hand, thus opening the way for bigger ones in the future" (Selwyn Hughes). The self-righteous, self-centred, "Lone Ranger" kind of Christian is basically no Christian at all. That's harsh, but it's true. You think I exaggerate? Then you have never really read about Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees. It was not the Jewish faith that offended Jesus. He was himself a Jew. It was those who used their religion as a bludgeon to elevate themselves by beating down others that were the object of his great scorn. Equally as offensive, however, in Christ's eyes are those nice, sweet Christians who have good intentions about real service to the world but never really seem to get into action.

Read 1 John 3:11-24

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Cain kill his brother? _____
and in what way was he trying to play God? _____

2. How do Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-8) illustrate the meaning of “love one another”? _____
3. How does the Cross of Christ illustrate this as well (v.16)

4. Read Matthew 5: 21-22. What comparison does Jesus draw between hatred, malicious anger, bitterness and murder?

Comment.

John points out that the opposite of love is seen in Cain vv 11- 15. Just take a look at v 12, 'Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his own brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.' Cain was full of pride, he would come to God on his own terms, not God's and that is sin- lawlessness, substituting our own laws for God's and so taking the place of God. But Cain also decided to take God's place in another sense too. When he saw that Abel's sacrifice was accepted - doing God's work, God's way- he decided to take Abel's life. He simply murdered him. God is the life giver and life taker- Cain decides that is his job too. And what led him to do such a monstrous thing? Jealousy- What began as a grudge gave birth to a thought and finally gave way to a deed. And John is saying: make sure that isn't happening to you.

5. What happens when someone does become a Christian and tries to do what God wants and all he/she gets from it is flak from friends and family who aren't Christians? The thought then comes that maybe they are taking it a bit too seriously and some compromise is in order or that the price is too high to pay. What does John say concerning this situation (v.13)? _____

6. Since Christ gave his life for us, what should we do for our brothers and sisters in Christ and how is this played out in real life (v.16)? _____

7. If a Christian has wealth, how should he use it? (v.17)

8. What does John say are two inadequate ways of trying to show Christian love (v.18)? Compare James 2:14-20 _____

9. If we love in deed and truth and yet our heart seems to condemn us, what may we rely on? (v.20) _____

Comment

The love we are considering is not simply an attitude it is an action. It is not primarily about the way we feel about each other but the way we deal with each other. Yes, says the anxious Christian, I might even say I am prepared to die for others in the church, but how do I know I ever will, perhaps I am simply kidding myself and so not a proper Christian after all? Well, John anticipates that objection which is why he goes on in v 17 to say 'If anyone sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.' Can you see what John is saying? Look at what you are doing and why you are doing it- actions and truth -and from there draw confidence of the change Christ has wrought in your heart. Do you see some children needing some Christian teaching? Then help out with the children's programme. Do you know of some Christian who is sick and housebound-then arrange to visit them. Are you aware of a Christian struggling at the moment? Then get alongside to encourage them. It is as down to earth as that. But of course all of this presupposes that we will be meeting with God's people so we can show love to them. Christians who, for whatever reason, cut themselves off from Christian fellowship- meeting on a Sunday or in a special group, are not only starving themselves of the spiritual oxygen they need to keep going (the ministry of the Word), but they are not allowing themselves to do one of the most vital things which

above all else will enable them to have the assurance they have been born again- namely, show love to fellow believers

10. How does loving others affect our assurance and our prayers?

11. What links does obedience have to love and to belief?

For Reflection. If you were to consciously practise “Jesus-like” love this week for a particular “brother,” how would you show it in your family? Church? Work? Community? Towards those you don’t like?

Closing Remarks

What is the answer to the certainty as to whether I am a true child of God or not? V19 'This then is how we know (there is that word again) that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything.' You see, John is not encouraging us to deny the condemnation of our hearts, for even that is a sign that God is at work in us; rather it encourages us to see that God knows even more than our hearts and still he loves us. Hear him as he says: 'You are mine. I sent my Son to secure you, he bled to forgive you- however much your hearts may condemn you such a condemnation will not be coming from me for I am greater than your hearts.' Now this verse is so important to remember when you are feeling crushed by sin and failure. It is meant not to turn you away from Christ but to propel you to turn to Christ. And once we have dealt with our condemning heart on the basis of what Christ has done for us we find ourselves in the position of v21, ' Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us (because they have been calmed by the blood of Christ) , we have confidence before him.' Then God strengthens that confidence by answered prayer '... we receive anything we ask because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.' That is, as a result of knowing that there is no barrier between ourselves and God- our sins having been removed, we can come into his presence with a bold confidence in prayer and as we start to pray for the things he wants- then answered prayer is further evidence that we are true believers.