

SESSION 6 – WEEK OF 21 FEB 2021

DO WE BEAR THE MARK OF TRUE LOVE?

SCRIPTURE: 1JOHN 3:11-24

Theme:

This passage is a deep elaboration of one of 1 John's major themes: *love*. The seed of this theme was planted in 2:10, and comes to full bloom in this passage as well as in 4:7 onwards. This section of the epistle challenges its readers to consider what the indicators or markers of love are, and to reflect on whether those markers are seen in the readers' own life.

Key Verse:

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." (1John 3:16)

Read 1 John 3:11-24

Core Questions for Discussion

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine Core Questions of two sessions and choose one Further Question from either session.)

1. Can you recall the key verse for last week's sermon? How does last week's sermon connect with this week's?

Last week's key verse is:

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. (1John 3.10)

- Last week's sermon focused our attention on three tests: (a) test of obedience (3:4,6,9); (b) test of love (3;1,10); and (c) test of hope (3:3).
 - This week's sermon focuses on (b), and asks "What does true love for brother and sister look like?"
2. Read 1 John 3:11-15. Here, John correlates hatred with murder. Why does John make such a strong association? What is the implication for us today?
 - Two reasons:
 - a) When one hates a person, one tends to actively seek to cause harm to that person. This may initially be some physical, financial, emotional, or psychological harm that

is not quite the taking of life. But if hatred is left to fester and grow, it can easily escalate into a desire to destroy the other person's life. This is illustrated in the example of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-12), as well as in the opposition to Jesus (John 8:39-44).

- b) Jesus Himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, drew a close connection between unresolved anger and hatred on the one hand, and with murder, judgment, and punishment on the other hand (Matthew 5:21-22).

- At verse 14 John provides a sign or test that "[w]e know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death." This sign or test is given so that Christians can know that they have passed from death to life. It emphasises that Christians need to love one another. If someone were to claim he/she has received the gift of life and yet failed to love one another, this verse says quite clearly that that person "remains in death." While eternal life is a gift from God, and we have to accept it by faith, the evidence of having this life must be shown in how we love each other.

- Implication: how seriously do we take unresolved anger and hatred? If we desire to take these as seriously as John does, what needs to change in the manner we think, feel, or act?

3. Read 1 John 3:16-19. According to this passage, what are the markers of true love? What is the attitude behind these markers – pretty and polished? Or painful and messy?

- Laying down one's life for brothers and sisters, as Jesus laid down His life for us (v.16). Jesus' death for us both *explains* what love really looks like (v.16a), and serves as an *example* of how we ought to love our brothers and sisters (v.16b).

- It should be noted that:

(a) laying down of one's life for brothers and sisters reiterates a command by Jesus, stated in John 15:12-13.

(b) laying down of one's life is an obligation or a debt owed to brothers and sisters ("we ought to / we are obligated to / we owe it to", v.16). Thus, the term "we ought to" implies not just an option or a matter of preference, but a commitment to love.

(c) laying down of one's life does not refer only to a physical, sacrificial, or heroic death. Verse 17 speaks of showing concern for a brother or sister in material need. In fact, the phrase "material possessions" (v.17) in the original Greek is literally "the life of the world", i.e. one's livelihood or material goods for daily living. Thus, one can lay down one's life in an ordinary and undramatic way, by laying down the fruits of one's livelihood to provide the necessities of life for a brother or sister in need.

"Understanding love in this way provides further insight into how hate, which John defines as the failure to provide for the life-sustaining needs of another, amounts to murder (3:15). It also makes good sense of the exhortation to lay down one's life as not something to be achieved by those heroic few who rush into burning buildings to save others, but as something that everyone can do. Those who work for a living spend their time (i.e., their lives) earning a livelihood. Sharing those earned resources with the vulnerable poor means that one is laying down one's life for the benefit of others"

- Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, & 3 John*, ZECNT, (Zondervan, 2014), p.159.

- Further, true love is marked not only by words, but also by practical actions (v.18) undertaken in alignment with the truth (vv.18,19).

- To John, "truth" is both a factual concept, as well as God's very nature (see John 14:6, 1John 5:6, 5:20). Thus, while the act of generous giving is important, it is also crucial that such generosity is motivated by trust, allegiance, and devotion to the one true God (see v.23).

- What is one practical way that you can lay down your life or livelihood for a brother or sister this week?

4. 1 John 3:22-24 speaks of God's *commands*. In which section of 1 John did we previously hear of these commands? From this previous passage and on 3:23, what insight do we receive concerning God's commands?

- We previously read of God's commands in 1 John 2:3-8 (sermon of 31 Jan 2021).

- In that passage, the Bible speaks of the new-old command.
- The command is old because Jesus drew on the Old Testament (Deut 6:4-6 and Lev 19:18) in His answer to the question "What is the Greatest Commandment?"
- Yet the command is also new because Jesus gives a new dimension to the command. That is, Christ's disciples are not merely to love others, but to love one another as Jesus first loved us. In other words, Jesus is a model for how we are to love, and for the extent we ought to love.
- This is mutually reinforcing with 1 John 3:16, where Jesus' laying down of His life on the cross is explicitly given as a model for how we ought to love others.

- 1 John 3:23 further reinforces the connection between (i) Jesus' love and actions unto us, and (ii) our love and actions unto others.

- We are not merely to love one another, as many other religions and philosophies might suggest. Rather, our love for one another must be grounded in a belief and trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

- Finally, note that keeping God's commands is not simply a matter of duty or obligation, but is associated with a desire to please God (1 John 3:22). Thus, God's commands call for a holistic response, from our entire being – that is, our cognitive assent (head), our loving behaviour (hands), and our affective commitment (heart).

Further Questions for Discussion

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

5. *If you have time ...*

Read 1 John 3:19-21, using several different Bible versions. How similar or different are they?

- Most Biblical scholars recognise that these verses display complexity of syntax and vocabulary, resulting in ambiguities in interpretation. Three key issues are:
 - o Does “our hearts” (v.19) connote one’s conscience, or attitude, or volition?
 - o Are our hearts “set at rest” (NIV), “reassured” (ESV), “confident” (NLT), or “convinced” (NET)?
 - o Does “This is how” at the beginning of v.19 refer to what follows, or to what precedes it?

“When we realize the utter and absolute demand of love, we may well find that our hearts do condemn us. We simply haven’t lived like that. But here is the mercy of God (v. 20): when that happens, ‘God is greater than our hearts. He knows everything.’ We can relax. He’s in control, and we wouldn’t even be experiencing this inner condemnation unless there was the work of God’s Spirit (v. 24), stirring us up to glimpse the life of love, even if that glimpse shows us how far we have fallen short.”

- Tom Wright, *The Letters of John: 9 Studies for Individuals and Groups*, (InterVarsity Press, 2012), p.29.

- This is not the place to address these rather technical issues. Those who are interested may consult various commentaries for detailed explanations.

- Despite the ambiguities about the details, the main point of vv.19-21 is clear: if we are faced with inner turmoil, God who knows everything is greater than this turmoil and provides us with assurance of His love. In other words: be assured!

Suggestions for Prayer

6. Would you consider praying for:
 - a. Those in your group, or others you may know of, who are struggling with unresolved anger or hatred. Pray that God will begin to bring about resolution

and release. If the matter is a long-standing one, healing and closure may take time – pray for continued openness and for God to bring wise and well-trained individuals who can provide support on this journey of resolution.

- b. Opportunities to lay down the fruits of our livelihoods to support brothers and sisters in need. Pray also for God to give us the grace and ability to do so.