

1 John 3:11-24

Week 5 - Christian License And Registration

Learning Objectives

- Examine what drives us to sin, and discuss how we can combat feelings of jealousy and greed, which urge us to sin.
- Look at Jesus as our Christian example for how to love others, and talk about how to model him better.
- Examine Love as a marker of our Christian identity, and how we can take comfort in God's presence.

Steps To Prepare (For Leaders)

- Think of a couple of times when you have been loved well, and be prepared to share them with the group.
- Read all of 1 John 3:11-24

? Tell us about a time that someone made you feel loved.

Read Out Loud: 1 John 3:11-16 (NIV)

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

? John starts this passage off by contrasting the Christian command to love one another with Cain's murder of Abel. Why do you think he makes this contrast?

Possible Answers: Love is hard and does not come natural to our human nature because it opposes our flesh: human nature often runs against Christian ideals. We want to feed our flesh instead of our Spirit, and we live in a fallen world. Truly loving another person requires that we consider their own interests more important than our own interests, and that's hard.

Read Out Loud: Genesis 4: 2-8 (NIV)

² Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

? What emotions were at the heart of Cain's sin? Do you ever struggle with some of the emotions he struggled with?

Possible Answers: Being jealous of another's acceptance, looking to compete with others instead of whole-heartedly serving God. Desiring the same recognition.

? As Christians, how can we combat the sins that crouch at our door and desire to have us?

Possible Answers: Love God and seek after Him, love others. prayer, be on the lookout for sins lurking and fight them-don't feed them. Respond to God's conviction.

What Was the Nature of Cain's Sin?

Many commentators think that Cain brought a poorer quality offering. However, since scripture doesn't directly comment on the quality of Cain's offering, Cain probably brought whatever was close at hand, while Abel clearly brings the best of what he has. It seems from the text, that Abel clearly had a heart to please God. Cain on the other hand became angry and jealous when his offerings were not received favorably. Cain could have acknowledged why his offering was not looked on favorably and moved in obedience towards God; instead he nurtured the anger, bitterness, and jealousy, which led him down a darker path.

? John tells the people of the early

church not to be surprised if the world hates them. This “hate” can manifest itself in many different ways today: your boss might disagree with your moral code, your friends might think you're a prude and make fun of your beliefs, strangers might think you're a loon when you casually mention Jesus, etc. Why do you think we're surprised that people of the world “hate” us, or that non-Christian values conflict with ours?

Possible Answers: In our daily lives we sometimes forget that the rest of the world doesn't share our Christian morals because hopefully our eyes are on Jesus. In fact, we shouldn't expect

non-Christian's thoughts, opinions, and desires to line up with ours, but we are sometimes offended when they don't. As Christians we should live boldly, fully expecting to come into opposition with the rest of the world. If we're living out the Gospel, we want everyone to come to know Jesus and the values that we as Christians live by, so when someone chooses to do the opposite, it can be disheartening.

? What are some practical ways we can respond when we face these kinds of situations?

Possible Answers: Praying for those who act in this way (or those who are subjected to it). Responding in love and with the Gospel rather than lashing out and retaliating. Direct confrontation, if appropriate. Drawing on the grace and love of Jesus even more as we realize he is the one source of true love!

Read Out Loud: 1 John 3:16-24 (NIV)

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

? John makes some strong bold powerful claims about Christian life. How should Jesus' example empower us to love boldly – even loving those that may hate us?

Possible Answers: Jesus sacrificed himself completely - living and dying for others.

Understanding how much he sacrificed on earth (Jesus didn't have a house, bed, consistent meals?, he was sleep deprived) should inspire similar sacrifice and fearlessness. Jesus is our example and clearly loved with actions, actions can be a more powerful and visible example of Christ's change in our lives, intentional acts of love can really stand out in a self-centered culture, etc.

? Why might John highlight verses 19 and 20, which say that God is greater than our hearts?

Possible Answer: Knowing that God is greater than our hearts means that despite our continued guilty feelings for past sins and/or continual struggle with sin, we can be confident that our sins have been forgiven through the atonement of Christ's sacrifice. At the same time, we can misinterpret our feelings, and hearts can be deceitful, so we should act on God's truth and not on how we may feel. We should look outward to God and not inward to self. Praise God! God is greater!

Leader's Note: These verses have been interpreted in different ways by different scholars.

1. http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/1Jo/1Jo_003.cfm?a=1162015

2. http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_1Jo/1Jo_3.cfm?a=1162014

If your group gets hung up concerning which interpretation is correct, encourage them to continue to pray about it and direct them to commentaries. Overall, however, help the group to land on the fact that regardless of a feeling of condemnation because of a deceitful heart or a feeling of conviction due to the need to repent God Is Bigger! We can't trust in our fickle feelings but we can trust in God's grace and love for us. Knowing that God is above our inadequacies gives us the peace and knowledge that we have been forgiven through the atonement of Christ's sacrifice. It is also important to understand that we are not able to base our relationship with God purely on how we feel.

? Verses 21-22 say that if our hearts don't condemn us, we can approach God with confidence, and he will give us anything we ask of Him. This makes God sound like a magic genie. Based on God's sovereignty, in what sense will God give us what we want?

Possible Answers: When we confess our sins to God, our consciences are clear and we can approach God with boldness in prayer, but God isn't a magic genie, and our requests must be congruent with the will of God. (1 John 5:14, John 16:24) What we want is not always what we need, but if we ask for the Holy Spirit, we will always receive Him. As we come to repentance, the Holy Spirit helps us to realign our thoughts, actions and beliefs on God, allowing us to walk in tandem with Him.

For Discussion and Accountability

? How can resting in Christ's love affect the way in which I love others this week?