



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: 1 John 3:11-24

1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!...**11** For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, **12** unlike Cain, who was of the evil one & murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil, & his brother's were righteous. **13** Do not be surprised, brothers & sisters, if the world hates you. **14** We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers & sisters. The one who does not love remains in death. **15** Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, & you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. **16** This is how we have come to know love: He laid down his life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers & sisters. **17** If anyone has this world's goods & sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him – how does God's love reside in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in action & in truth. **19** This is how we will know that we belong to the truth & will reassure our hearts before him **20** whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, & he knows all things. **21** Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence before God **22** & receive whatever we ask from him because we keep his commands & do what is pleasing in his sight. **23** Now this is his command: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, & love one another as he commanded us. **24** The one who keeps his commands remains in him, & he in him. And the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he has given us. (1 Jn. 3:1, 11-24)

Overview: God's children are a product of his love, & therefore are people who share his love with others. But what happens when they fail to love others? How do they deal with the resulting feelings of inadequacy & incapability? God assures them that he knows & that they are to trust him.

- ***“The distinguishing difference between children of God & children of the devil is love for God & others, defined here to be a compassionate response to the life-sustaining needs of others. Because one's most dire need is eternal life, it is never loving to teach heresy that***

*will lead people away from life in God, as the secessionists were doing. Furthermore, **sustaining the physical lives of the vulnerable poor in the church is the proper way to return God's love & to channel it to the benefit of his children.***" (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 196)

- **"The result of...fellowship with God will inevitably be the world's hatred of us. The love of God for man is spiritual & perfect, & according to light, which always rebukes sin. It is this element which stirs up the hatred of men. Our love is to be in deed & in truth, rather than in word & with the tongue."** (G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, 528)

1. The Context of the Letter & the Condition of the Believers – identity shaken, uncertain, trauma,

- **"Our author is dealing with a 'post mortem' situation. There has been a split in the Christian community, & some of its members have been lost through their departure. Healing is needed, reassurance must be offered, & reasons to continue to embrace the fundamental values must be given..."** (Ben Witherington, *Letters & Homilies*, pp. 431-2)
- **"The schism had left believers uncertain of their standing, uncertain of their faith. There was also the trauma caused by the rending of a community with all the pain & confusion that brings. 1 John addresses the trauma of the schism & its aftermath and sets out to heal, reaffirm, & reassure the believers."** (John Painter, *Johannine Literature*," in DE. Aune (ed.) Blackwell Companion to the NT, p. 367)
- **John "writes to assure the community, which has recently suffered the trauma of schism, that its members are in communion with God. If this reconstruction is correct, 1 John was originally a circular letter that dealt with the crisis occasioned by the departure of some of its members."** (Frank J. Matera, *NT Theology*, p. 319)
- **"The internal schism...evidenced in [John's] Letters...must have shaken the community's preconceived values in a profound way. External challenges could be coped with...Internal challenges, by contrast, threaten the very identity of the group."** (Kari Syreeni, *Becoming John*, p. 198)

2. Learning to Love Again (1 Jn. 3:1, 11-18)

- **"Children of God must live out the family resemblance by doing what is right, including loving their brothers & sisters in the church...by providing resources of sustenance for those in need. Love is the most basic expression of Johannine ethics, the kind of love that goes deeper than mere words & platitudes & becomes a willingness to act on the behalf of the best interests of others. This means first of all that love is expressed not in feelings & sentiments, but in actions."** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, pp. 204-5)
- **"...the truest evidence of being God's children, [is] loving each other as Christ loved us..."** (Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, p. 415)
- **"John reminds his readers of Christ's command that his followers should love one another, stressing that genuine love for fellow believers is an important mark of those who belong to the truth (v. 19)."** (NIV Study Bible, p. 2566)

a. Love one another: The message we heard from the beginning (v. 11)

- **"This verse [11] is...one of two major structuring verses in the letter. The other structuring phrase comes in 1:5, which shares with 3:11 a basic similarity in form..."** (George L. Parsenios, *Paedia Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, p. 99)

a. Don't follow Cain's example (v. 12) – the counterexample to loving one another

- **"In 1 Jn. 3, Cain represents the opponents of the author, who are mentioned in the immediately preceding section (3:7–10)...The struggle with the opponents is projected onto the characters of Cain & Abel."** (George L. Parsenios, *Paedia Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, p. 100)
- **"John gives the counterexample of Cain, the world's first murderer, who killed his own brother. Cain's motive for killing his brother reveals a foundational spiritual principle about life in this world: those who do not do what is right hate those who do."** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 198)

- b. Don't be surprised when the world hates you (v. 13) – vv. 13-15 is the application – the world hates those who are trying to live their faith/righteousness out
- **“The world, which is self-deceived in its rejection of God (Jn 1:8–10), resents those who try to obey God through their living by biblical values & principles.”** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 199)
 - **“No matter how nice Christians may be to others, those of the world will feel implicitly accused & condemned by the Christian’s faith in a Savior who died for sin because the world does not want to believe in sin. To the unbelieving world, morality can appropriately be based on education to correct ignorance & on some sense of social fairness, but not on the existence of a holy God who is entitled to define right from wrong & expect us to live by it.”** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 207)
 - **“With the story of the brother Cain fresh in their minds, they are reminded that they too are brothers & sisters who have been betrayed. The imagery of a brother betrayed from the story of Cain & Abel is being directly projected onto the readers, subtly but clearly.”** (George L. Parsenius, *Paedia Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, p. 101)
- c. Loving one another proves you have passed out of death & into life (vv. 14-15)
- **“In John’s thinking, those who follow Christ & walk in the light are in fellowship with the life-giving God, but those who don’t do so remain in the realm of darkness & death.”** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 200)
 - **“Death here is not a future event but refers to the realm into which the fall in the garden of Eden has put us all. The failure to love characterizes the realm of death & is equivalent to being in the darkness (2:9, 11).”** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 200)
 - **“The perfect tense of the verb, ‘we have passed over from death into life,’ expresses what scholars refer to as John’s realized eschatology. While most NT writers speak of salvation & the deliverance from God’s judgment as something that is yet future, John considers it something that believers have already experienced.”** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 200)
 - **“‘Eternal life’ is not future survival beyond the grave, but an accomplished reality for those within the community whose love for one another demonstrates their crossover into life that is real & indestructible.”** (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 841)
- b. Love one another as Jesus loved us (vv. 16-17)
- a. He laid down his life for us
- **“The language of laying down one’s life, especially when applied to Christ, draws directly from the Gospel of John. In the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10, Jesus says that the Good Shepherd ‘lays down his life’ for the sheep (10:11, 15, 17, 18). Just as in the present text, Jesus will direct his disciples to follow his example & to lay down their lives for one another (15:13).”** (George L. Parsenius, *Paedia Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, p. 102)
- b. We should lay down our lives for others
- **“[John] wants his readers to love others in the way that the Lord defines love, not in the way the world does. He points to Jesus (‘that One’), who laid down his life on our behalf, as the true expression of genuine love. To press the point home, he explicitly states that ‘we’ also should lay down our lives on behalf of others. This immediately gives pause, for Jesus actually died on behalf of those he came to save. Does John really expect his readers to die for others? Jesus’ death was a once-for-all-time event in God’s redemptive plan, so how could anyone imitate that? ...In the next verse, John goes on to indicate that [to lay down one’s life] is expressed by providing for the life-sustaining needs of others.”** (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 202)
 - **“Laying down one’s life for sisters & brothers seems by definition to be once-in-a-lifetime heroism at best. Perhaps for that reason [John] offers a matter-of-fact example of what he has in mind: practical attention to those lacking life’s basic necessities, paid by those with means of livelihood. Such a conclusion for vv. 11-18 may seem anticlimactic & more obviously appropriate to the letter of James. Yet it plays a crucial role at this stage in [John’s] discussion. The reader’s attention is thereby concentrated...on the durable responsibility of love that members of the church owe one another.”** (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 841)
 - **“The nature of the response...varies, depending on who is in need. How one responds to the needs of family & intimate friends would be appropriately different from how one responds to the needs of those in the neighborhood or in the church or around the globe. But an appropriate response to the needs of others is expected of God’s children. Such love, depending on the circumstances & the people involved, might mean providing money or other resources to assist someone in need, spending time to assist such a person, or even possibly offering something as radical as an organ donation to keep someone alive. God**

expects us to do what we can, not what we can't. But love is not limited to these occasional dire situations." (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 222)

c. If we have material means, we should help others in need

- *"God is the ultimate source of all provision, but most often **he distributes it through people helping people.** Everything we have is by the grace of God, & to withhold life resources from those in need blocks his channel of provision for them."* (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 158)
- *"The phrase here translated 'abundant life of the world' is really just the term bios, 'life.' The translation 'abundant life' was chosen partly due to the context, a scenario in which one person has enough to share with another. Also in mind is the use of this term in 1 John 2:16, where it exemplified the presumptuous & self-satisfied sense that the delights of this earthly life can satisfy human longing for the divine."* (George L. Parsenius, *Paedia Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, p. 103)

c. Love one another in action & truth, not just word or speech (v. 18)

- **Love as the Bible defines it is doing what is needed to care for the needs of others.** This doesn't exclude warm feelings or commitments, but it means that **Christians should live in a way that considerably responds to the needs of those around them.** It means making life-sustaining resources available to meet the needs of those in dire circumstances – providing clean water, food, clothing, shelter, & of greatest importance, the true gospel of Jesus Christ." (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, pp. 205-6)

3. We Should Trust God (1 Jn. 3:19-24) – Reassurance

- *"John addresses **the problem of Christian conscience** here, that **inner voice ('heart')** that **accuses one of failing to live up to God's expectations.**"* (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 213)
- *"John reassures his readers that **even though the demands of love for others may stir feelings of being inadequate & incapable**, the understanding that God knows the Spirit-empowered impulses of his children's hearts better than they know themselves will silence that accusing inner voice."* (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 211)
- *"John addresses the **psychological/spiritual feelings of inadequacy & failure that believers face** when sincerely trying to live rightly (3:19-22). **He reassures his readers that even when their inner voice of conscience nags, God knows that the hearts of his children are in the right place, & they can trust God's mercy & grace & approach him in confidence.** The very acts of believing in Christ & providing for the needs of others are evidence that God's Spirit dwells within them, for the type of love that God defines is not characteristic of fallen & unredeemed people."* (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 210)
- *"In 3:19-24...the implied problem within the community is...**insecurity** of devout Christians whose **hearts may convict them of failure to do those things that they ought** (3:17-18). We understand that fear of **inadequacy**. If taken seriously, a willingness to lay down one's life for others (3:16) is, to say at least, a formidable challenge...The summons to share one's abundance with Christians in want (3:17), triggers pangs of conscience among middle class congregations that feel sucked into the Vortex of upward mobility & guilt for their affluence. Over against this anxiety stands the solace in knowing that God is greater than our hearts, & he knows everything (3:20). Because we are not God, we are neither the norm nor the final arbiter of our activity as Christians. **Our supreme court is not the human heart, whose feelings are fickle & manipulable by fear to self-condemnation. Our court of final appeal is God**, whose antecedent love for us makes possible our own love (4:19) & in whom we invest complete confidence (3:21). 'Conscience is one drop,' mused Luther, 'the reconciled God is a sea of comfort.' 1 John 3:19-24 amounts to a repudiation of any attempt by any Christian to lay a cheap guilt trip on anyone."* (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 845)

a. Whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our hearts (vv. 19-20)

- *"Any way of construing these two verses [vv. 19-20] leaves some part of the syntax unsatisfied. Despite the exegetical ambiguities, the major gist of John's thought is clear. The NLT nicely captures it: 'It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before the Lord, even if our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, & he knows everything.'"* (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 215)

a. Whenever our heart condemns us

- **“The object of reassurance is the heart.** The heart can certainly condemn a person...In a biblical view, the heart is the seat of moral reflection – & of self-condemnation. **The heart, therefore, must be reassured in the face of coming judgment so that it does not condemn a person.**” (George L. Parsenios, *Paedia Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John*, p. 105)
- **“Even while we intend to love others rightly & fully, the needs around us are so great, & we are so limited & flawed, that one might still be plagued by an accusing inner voice.** We all know that many of our good intentions have gone wrong or been left undone, or have fallen short in some way...**The feeling that we have disappointed God despite our best efforts can destroy our intimacy with the heavenly Father...**” (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 222)
- **“God recognizes that our flawed, inadequate attempts to love others are genuine acts of faith & love.** He knows all about the people we attempt to love & the situations that have given rise to their needs. Our attempt to respond to another’s need may be misguided or miscalculated. The person we try to love may rebuff our good intent.” (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 223)
- **“[John] knows that his readers need to quiet their hearts in order to continue in their faith in Christ & in their love for others.** For a heart that constantly accuses us of disappointing God will erode our resolve to love, & it will keep us from enjoying our relationship with our heavenly Father. Feelings of inadequacy or failure will impede our prayer life by making us shy away from God. **John’s remedy for quieting a restless heart is surprisingly simple to state, but possibly difficult to achieve: trust God, who knows all things & who knows us better than we know ourselves.**” (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 223)

b. God is greater than our hearts

- **“How are we to understand the statement that ‘God is greater than our hearts’? John’s primary point is that Christian believers can have confidence before God even when their inner voice accuses them.** In the first place, if someone feels legitimate guilt over sin, John has already made the foundational point that **cleansing is available by the blood of Christ upon confession (1:7; 2:1–2).** But for a believer who is sensitive to the needs of others, there is an almost ever-present sense of not doing enough to meet those needs. **First, there is ‘illegitimate guilt’** that can be generated when a person’s internal moral compass has been shaped, for instance, by unrealistic expectations, a distorted understanding of moral truth, a perfectionistic attitude toward self-behavior, & so forth. **Second, since the needs around us far exceed our ability to respond, how should Christians deal with feeling inadequate in the face of great need?** At what point, if any, should we not feel guilty about the unmet needs of others? John’s reference to the heart that accuses may be illustrated by the uncomfortable feeling many people get when **viewing images of starving children in Africa.** People could give until they themselves were starving, & yet they would make little dent in such overwhelming need. **God calls us to do what we can & leave the rest to him.** We must do our best to love others, & then we need to trust God, not only for our further provision, but also for our own peace of mind about it before him...**[R]eassurance cannot come from within us, but must come from...God...**” (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, pp. 215-6)

b. If our hearts don’t condemn us, (vv. 21-22)

- **“With regard to the hearts of his beloved readers, [John] imagines two possibilities. One is that our hearts might condemn us without full account of the evidence.** In that event, the verdict in our case is overruled by a higher court: God, who, unlike our fallible scruples, knows everything necessary to render a valid judgment. **Another, simpler possibility is that our hearts do not condemn us, so that we may stand with assurance before the Judge.**” (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 843)

a. We have confidence before God

- **“With the accusing inner voice silenced, a believer is free to approach God in prayer with the confidence that God will respond in a positive manner to the requests we lay before him.**” (Karen Jobes, *Exegetical Commentary on the NT: 1, 2, & 3 John*, p. 217)

b. We receive whatever we ask from God because

- **“Whether we are vindicated by our hearts or by God, ...we are positioned to receive from God whatever we ask – provided...‘that we keep his commandments & do what is pleasing before him.’** Here, as elsewhere, **unspecified commandments are resolved into the primary commandment of love for one another.**” (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 843)
- **“The community’s requests of God are not capricious or self-interested.** They flow directly from obedience to the love command of Jesus & dedication to God’s pleasure, not the church’s own.” (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 844)

a. We keep his commands

- **“The promise of answered prayer is balanced against another consideration: ‘we keep his Commandments & do what is pleasing in his sight.’ Obedience is the environment for which our petitions flow...**As God’s children, our first & last concern is that God is pleased...**Stirred by the Spirit (3:24), our dedication to do what**

pleases God shapes, informs, & defines the petitions we make. That kind of commitment...prevents the degradation of our requests into self-aggrandizement & assures their fulfillment by a merciful God." (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: 1 John*, pp. 845-6)

- b. We do what is pleasing in his sight
- c. God's Command (vv. 23-24a)
 - *"Here we find **John's most explicit definition of God's commandment. It is double-pronged. First, we 'believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ'...**The simplest meaning would be to accept & confess the basic Christian proclamation about Jesus as God's Son & Christ...V. 23 may further imply the responsibility of Christians to entrust themselves as fully to Christ as he has entrusted himself to them...The **second** prong of God's command is ethical in tenor...**love for one another.** The commandment's theological & ethical components are inseparable: without faith in Christ we are not able to love one another properly..."* (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 844)
- a. Believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
- b. Love one another
- c. The key to mutually remaining in one another
- d. Reassured by the Spirit that we remain in God (v. 24b)
 - *"In addition to self-giving love for others (1 John 3:11-18) & adherence to the commandment (1 John 3:19-23), we find in v. 24 **another instrument by which the church may verify its persistence in God's life: corroboration by the Spirit...**"* (Clifton Black, *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: 1 John*, p. 844)