

1 John – God is Love: Week Three

What it Means to Love

Day Two: How to Identify Genuine Love for God

Read 1 John 3:18-24

When I read these inspired words of our precious brother John, I am curious as to what the people in his church were like! Remember back in Chapter One when John wrote statements such as “If we say that we have fellowship with Him” ...” If we say that we have not sinned” ...” The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him’? It sounds like the people were content to say all the right things, but it was all just that – talk! Talk is cheap.

In Chapter Three, John brings this point back to the people’s attention – and of course, our attention as well. He must have known people who said they loved God, maybe sang the songs, raised their hands, and used all of the “religious lingo”. They knew the correct answers, but John could tell that they didn’t truly love God. John knew there was a difference between his own understanding and theirs about what genuine love for God is.

Read 1 John 4:20-21

Based on the verses in Chapter Four, what was the evidence that they genuinely love God?

Read 1 John 5:1-2

Here are 2 true statements. Fill in the blanks.

- Whoever loves the Father _____
 - If we love the children of God, we will _____ and will _____
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Reread 1 John 3:10-15 and answer the questions.

1. As a refresher, how is that we can tell the children of God apart from the children of the devil? (v.10)
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2. Which Bible character does John use as an example of what we should not imitate?

3. What is another name for someone who still hates his brother? (v. 15)

Let's learn more about Cain. **Read his story in Genesis 4:1-16.**

Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, was a "tiller of the ground". He worked the soil, grew crops, and most likely fed his family with the produce. His younger brother, Abel, watched over the flocks, probably sheep and goats. Both men seemed like good, hardworking, sons.

One day, the two sons of Adam, were going to bring an offering to the Lord.

We don't know anything about this offering. Was this something God had instructed them to do? Did Adam and Eve regularly bring offerings to the Lord? It's not clear. But we do know that one son brought the vegetables from his farm, and the other brought a lamb. The Scripture tells us that God had regard (or favor) for Abel's sacrifice, but not the offering that Cain brought.

Why did God favor Abel's sacrifice? Was it because he liked Abel better? No! Here are three reasons why God chose Abel's sacrifice:

1. Jesus said that the Old Testament pointed to Him. *"All things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."* Luke 24:44b Throughout Scripture we know that God symbolically points us to Jesus, so that it would not be unreasonable to assume that in this case, the sacrifice of a lamb was symbolic of the future sacrifice of God's Son as the Lamb of God. God didn't offer vegetables for our sin, He offered His Son, and the blood of His Son was shed to atone (pay) for our sin.
2. The Bible tells us that without blood being shed, there is no forgiveness of sin. Abel was coming to God seeking His forgiveness and offering the lamb's life in exchange for his own.

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement." Leviticus 17:11

Read Hebrews 11:4, 6

3. Abel 's offering was by faith, according to Hebrews 11:4. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. God may have shared with Adam and Eve and their children the future promise, and Abel knew that only when blood has been shed would God accept his offering.

Cain's offering was something that he had worked for. It was a result of his own effort. Cain attempted to offer God something that was good to him, but not to God. God's ways are higher than ours.

Here is the point: Abel knew what was acceptable to God.

Cain was trying to show God his efforts and hard work. Abel was seeking forgiveness for his sin. Cain approached God on the basis of his own works. Abel approached God by faith.

Don't we, like Cain, also think that we can come to God through our own merits? We need to understand that **nothing we do** through our human efforts is going to please God. **Only what we do through the power of the Holy Spirit, as we abide in the Vine (Jesus) will be of lasting value.**

"I am the vine you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

Re-read Genesis 4:5-7

1. What was Cain's response when he saw that God was pleased with Abel's offering but not his own? _____

God may have chosen an animal sacrifice over a vegetable offering, but He didn't love Cain less than Abel. As you read verses 6 and 7, hear the loving heart of God for his child, Cain. God does not condemn him. He gently instructs Cain in how to fight a spiritual battle. Notice how he encourages him and tells him that he can overcome the sin in his heart.

But Cain's heart was filled with anger, jealousy, and every evil thought toward his brother. He hated Abel. And what had Abel done to deserve Cain's hatred? Nothing. He had simply sacrificed a lamb.

Cain had a heart problem, and so do we. We will spend some time on Day Three considering our heart. But for now, we need to heed the advice that God gave to Cain in Genesis 4:7. God told Cain that *“sin was crouching at the door and its desire was for him.”* And then he told Cain to do what we also must do when it comes to sin.

2. What did God tell Cain to do with sin? (Gen. 4:7) _____.

Cain is told to master – or overcome – sin. We are also told to overcome sin. We are not to excuse it, but rather to master it.

Re-read 1 John 3:11-15

Cain lost the battle with sin. The hatred in his heart resulted in murder. *“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”* (1 John 3:15)

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.”* (Matthew 5:21-22a)

“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain” 1 John 3:11-12a

We were all born with the same evil nature that Cain had, and we know that if we want to learn to love as Christ loves us, we need to learn how to master the sin that *“desires us”*. Let’s learn from Cain’s brother, Abel – he brought an offering by faith, and faith comes by hearing God’s Word. (Romans 10:17)

Before you are overwhelmed with what the Word tells us regarding how we are to show genuine love, remember that it is only as we (by faith) are abiding in the Vine. We are not able to agape love, apart from Jesus.

Read these verses and answer the questions.

1. John (Gospel) 15:12-13 How specifically are we told to love one another?

2. Matthew 25:34-40 Jesus taught us that we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in prison. When we do those things for any one of the brothers (or sisters) who are we actually doing it for? (v. 40)

3. Isaiah 58:6-11 What will be our reward for showing love to our brothers and sisters?

4. 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 What is already a defeat for us? (v.7)

What should we be willing to do instead? _____

5. Romans 14:15-21 What could be a stumbling block for our brothers and sisters? _____

How can we show love for them? _____

6. 2 Timothy 2:10 What does Paul do for the sake of those who are chosen (those who believe and follow Christ)? _____

Why does he do it? _____

Today our focus has been on what genuine love for God is, and how to identify it.

Based on today's study of 1 John Chapter Three and the other verses we read, how will you now identify genuine love for God? _____
