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Christian Assurance

Session 3

1 John 2:1-11

Main Point

We can live lives marked by love when we keep in mind the loving sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the most successful team you've ever been on? What made you successful?

What was the dynamic of that team like? How did you feel about one another?

Why is it important to know there is someone who is willing to fight for you?

It is a wonderful thing to know that someone will fight for you. How much more wonderful to know that One is the Son of God. John realized that even those who are children of the light will struggle with sin. When we encounter that struggle with sin, the best thing we can do is to again and again look to Jesus. What we will find is not a Jesus who is ashamed of us, but One who is on our side as our Advocate. This, in turn, helps us love others.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read 1 John 2:1-6.

Why did John address his readers as little children? What does that indicate about the nature of what he is about to share?

Did John think it was possible for people to be completely without sin? How do you know?

If he didn't mean that a person could be without sin, what was his intent?

John was realistic with his assessment of the Christian faith. He recognized that there was no middle ground with Jesus—there is either darkness or light. To that end, he knew that habitual, unrepentant sin could not characterize a true follower of Jesus. This was an important point to make in order to counter the false teachers of the day who believed that behavior had little to do with what they believed.

How would you respond to someone who believed something similar to these false teachers—that behavior and faith have no relationship to each other?

Why, then, can John be so definite in his pronouncement in verse 4?

While obedience can never merit salvation, those who truly know Jesus and are known by Him are profoundly changed. They desire above all to walk in the way Jesus walked, so that even when they sin, they are quick to repent and turn again and again to Christ. The good news is that in turning to Christ they find an Advocate waiting for them.

Why is it personally meaningful to know that Jesus is not just your Savior but your Advocate?

How does knowing that Jesus is your Advocate change the way you live on a day-to-day basis?

How does it change the way you come to God after you have sinned?

How is Jesus' advocacy related to His sacrifice as the propitiation for our sins?

The word "propitiation" refers to the removal of divine wrath. Apart from Christ, we are left to pay the just penalty for our sin. But Jesus absorbed the righteous wrath of God on our behalf at the cross. The cross is the ultimate example of Jesus' advocacy. Because He died in our place, we can know that even now He is on our side.

Have a volunteer read 1 John 2:7-11.

Why is it important that we see the command to love one another as a commandment from the beginning?

What does doing so show us about the nature and character of God?

In what way is this command both old and new (v. 8)?

As far back as Leviticus 19:18, the people of Israel were commanded to love their neighbors. However, this command takes on a freshness for the Christian given the demonstration of Jesus' love. Jesus laid down His life, not for those who were worthy, but for those who were unworthy. When we love as Jesus did, we play an active role in revealing the light of Jesus to those around us.

Think about a time when someone loved you in a manner similar to how Jesus does. How did that experience bring light to your situation?

How can John be so definite in his statement that if you hate your brother you live in darkness?

What, then, can we conclude about the nature of God's love for us?

The defining mark of the disciple of Jesus is love. In this new command, we see how the love of Jesus is expressed day in and day out. When we love each other, we are transferring what we have first received from the One who died to save us from sin and death. As we do, the darkness is continually pushed back in favor of the light.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How will your approach to repentance of sin be different this week in light of this text?

Is there anyone you need to reach out to this week to demonstrate the love of Jesus?

How are you going to remind yourself tomorrow that Jesus is your Advocate?

Pray

Pray to close your group, thanking God that He has graciously given Jesus as the sacrifice for your sins. Pray that you would dwell on that sacrifice, being quick to repent of sin and quick to love those around you with the same love God has extended to you.

Commentary

1 John 2:1-11

In 1 John 2:1-11, John warmly and tenderly addressed his readers as little children not only here but in many other places in the letter. As a part of that affection, John wanted them to not sin. The verb tense here conveys acts of sin as opposed to habitual sin. John assumed they weren't living a sinful lifestyle, but also realized that there would inevitably be a time when they did sin. What would they do then? According to John, they should remember the good and finished work of Jesus.

John described Jesus as our advocate, the same word Jesus used for the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. The word means "one called alongside" to present a defendant's case. Jesus is the righteous one who fully obeyed the Father's command, and because He is, He is qualified to represent us before God. The greatest way He demonstrated His love for us and His obedience to the Father was His voluntary death as the propitiation for our sins. The term propitiation refers to the removal of divine wrath. Jesus took the righteous and just punishment for sin on Himself, and because He did, we can always return to that fact when we find ourselves in sin.

But these sins cannot be our general pattern of life, because obedience to Christ's commands is evidence that our faith is real and we know Him. The word know conveys the idea of knowledge by experience. Unlike the false teachers John was writing against who argued that conduct was unimportant, John claimed that anyone who claims to know Christ but doesn't keep His commands is a liar. The genuine believer is the one who consistently keeps Christ's word, walking as He walked.

As true believers walk as Jesus walked, one of the primary ways that walk will be exhibited is through their love. This wasn't a new command; it's as old as Leviticus 19:18, but loving one's neighbors as one's self was fresh in its centrality in the Christian life. It echoes the words of Jesus in the upper room (John 13:34), and its emphasis is on loving as Jesus loved. This kind of love pushes back the darkness of evil and hatred and reveals the true light that Jesus is and brings. So important is this love that a person cannot truly live in the light and at the same time hate his brother. That hatred is evidence that a person remains in the darkness, or in the realm of evil.