

Witnesses to the TRUTH



A Study of John's Letters

LESSON 2: 1 JOHN 2:3-11



INFORMATION FOR TEACHER

This lesson is about loving our brothers and sisters. The goal is to get your class to think of how this works out concretely. Don't let them think of love in the abstract, and don't let them off easy. Loving our brothers and sisters is *tough*. Real *agape* love is too rare in the church, and this passage should push us to see if we're in line with God's will in how we're treating our brothers and sisters.



BIG IDEAS

- *We know we are in Christ if we love our brothers and sisters.*



DISCUSSION

- *What makes people "hard to love?"*



INTRODUCTION

This passage (2:3-11) follows closely the themes introduced in last week's text; namely, that our actions must match our beliefs. In this week's passage, we find that claiming to know God means that we must match some specific behaviors of God's son; otherwise, our claim to know God is a lie. John is going to call his readers to think heavily about how much their walk matches their talk.



THE BIBLICAL TEXT

I. 1 John 2:3-6

Read 1 John 2:3-6

John continues his theme of knowing God. Verse 3 spells out plain evidence of knowledge of God: we *know* God when we *keep his commands*. In fact, those who claim to know him but disobey his commands are *liars*.

Verses 5b-6 say it a different way: we *know* we are in him if we *walk as Jesus did*.

- ***John says we must “live as Jesus did.” What kinds of behaviors and actions does that include?***
- ***At various times in our history, asking the question “What would Jesus do?” has been stylish. What is good about this particular question? What is not so good?***

This is all well and good, but “keep his commands” is a very generic command. Does John have any specific *commands* in mind? We’ll find out in the next section.

II. 1 John 2:7-11

Read 1 John 2:7-11

John continues his use of the word “command” here, so maybe he’s on his way to something more specific. Before we deal with verses 7-8, let’s skip to verse 9 to see what command John has in mind.

Returning to his theme of dark and light, John gives a *specific action* that lets us know we’re in darkness: hating a brother or sister. *This seems to be a particular command John has been alluding to in earlier verses.* We could reword verses 3-4 to say “We know that we have come to know him if we love our brothers and sisters. Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not love his/her brothers and sisters is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”

Jesus even summed up his commands by saying “love God” and “love your neighbor” (Matt. 22:37-39). So it’s very proper to assert that “keeping the commands” = “loving others.”

Those who hate their brothers and sisters are *in* the darkness and *walk around* in darkness (2:11). They are so aimless that they can’t see where they’re going.

- ***In what ways did Jesus demonstrate love for others?***

- ***We often hear that love is an action more than just an emotion. What then does it look like to love our brothers and sisters?***
- ***What might it look like to hate them?***
- ***Shouldn't we love everyone? Why is John emphasizing our brothers and sisters in Christ?***
- ***What do our brothers and sisters in Christ deserve from us?***

Now let's return to verses 7-8. John says this command is not new, but old. In fact, we can see early traces of it back in *Leviticus*! (And you thought it was just about how to sacrifice!)

Read Leviticus 19:18

18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Here, the Israelites are restricted as to what they can do to *one of their own* (remember John particularly concerned with our *brothers and sisters* and not just *everyone*). In this passage, loving a neighbor is *contrasted* with seeking revenge or bearing a grudge.

- ***How does the Leviticus passage help interpret the command to love our brothers and sisters?***

John then says it's a *new* command (v.8). Didn't he just say it *wasn't* new? Yes, but it is seen in a new light after the

Historical Note: Remember, John is still concerned with the docetists who have left the church. By their refusal to show love toward the remaining members of the church, they are demonstrating that they are still in the darkness.

life, death, and resurrection of Christ. John says as much in verse 8, when he writes that "its truth [the command's truth] is seen in *him* and you." We see the true nature of this command through the lens of Christ, and *because* of Christ, the darkness is already passing away. The light has come.

- ***What is "new" about this command in light of the life of Christ?***



PUTTING SCRIPTURE TO WORK

- ***What do you need to change in order to love some brothers and sisters (or a particular brother or sister) that you're not loving right now?***
- ***What would John say about our worship (claiming to "know God") if he knew how we treated our brothers and sisters?***
- ***Read Matt. 5:23-24. Is it useful to worship if we are not in a right relationship with a brother or sister?***
- ***Why are our relationships with brothers and sisters so important?***



FOR NEXT WEEK

Read 1 John 2:12-27.