

**John's First Epistle**  
**Week Three**  
**1 John 3:1-24**

**Day One**

<sup>1</sup>How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

v. 1 – John was the apostle of love. Tradition tells us that when John was old, probably as old as when he wrote this letter, he was frail and could hardly be heard when he spoke. Men would carry him into a room to share a message and he would simply say, “Love one another!” John had reduced his message down to its most manageable component and that component was love. **Is that the basis for your work in the Lord as well?**

**What was the source of this love?** It all started with the Father's love He lavished on us in Christ that enabled us to become His children. And John confidently and boldly proclaimed that this is exactly what we are: God's children. The world cannot recognize that this is who we are, since they don't know the Father. If one claims to be in the Father, then he or she must have fellowship with His Son, Jesus, or else that person is deceived. The only way to the Father, however, is through the Son, so that becoming a child of God is accessible only through faith in Christ. **Do you see how John was encouraging those who had not left in the church that their relationship with the Lord was and is secure?**

v. 2 – The final state of God's children has not been revealed. In other words, we don't know what is ahead of us when we meet the Lord either through death or Jesus' return. We do know, however, that we will be like Him! **What is He like?** Well, think of Jesus when He came back from the dead. He had glorified flesh. He could eat, had full memory from before His death, could pass through locked doors, was recognizable but had something about Him that made Him unrecognizable at times to those who knew Him well.

Later we will see and know the Lord as He is and that will enable us to be even more like Him. In some sense, our identity is not found in ourselves but in Him, both now and then. Furthermore, “seeing” Him is our source of personal transformation:

"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5).

v. 3 – God is our source for any and all spiritual formation. John wrote that when you put your hope in Him, you purify yourself as He is pure. That makes me think of one of the Beatitudes, which states:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8).

**Can you see a cycle that if you purify yourself, you see God and when you see Him, you become more like Him, which means you purify yourself even more?**

### Day Two

<sup>4</sup> Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

v. 4 – God gave us the Law, which is righteous and holy, so we would be aware of sin. God has standards, but without the Law, we would not know what those standards are. So when you sin, you break the Law or violate God’s standards. John made the simple statement that all sin is lawlessness or breaking the law of God.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10).

v. 5 – Jesus came and fulfilled the Law perfectly, the only Man who could do so, and then paid the penalty for breaking the Law on our behalf. Jesus suffered a death that was due to you and me as lawbreakers. That gives you an idea of how serious sin is in the eyes of God. What’s more, Jesus paid the price so that our sins could be forgiven on an ongoing basis without limit.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

v. 6 – **Did John mean that if I am in Jesus, I will never sin again?** No, that is not what he meant. **Does it mean that sin will not rule my life any longer?** By experience we know that this is not the case. **Then what was John trying to say here?** He was saying the dominion that sin once had in my life is broken when I am in Christ. Once in Christ, you are sensitive to sin, you confess sin, you repent of sin, you seek the Lord for grace to change, and the fruit of the Spirit develops in your life to produce righteous behavior and the mind of Christ.

Before you knew the Lord, you lived in the land of sin. Now whenever you visit that land, you are not happy or at peace, and you run home as often as He makes you aware of where you are. **Why does this verse cause confusion and why was John not more clear in what he was writing?** It is because John was addressing a particular problem that was in the church at that time and we are not quite sure what error was being taught that John was addressing. The next few verses give us more insight into the problem.

### Day Three

<sup>7</sup>Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup>He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. <sup>9</sup>No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup>This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

v. 7 – It seems that someone had been teaching that sin did not matter, that those who follow Jesus were somehow indifferent to sin or that those in Christ sinned just like anyone else. Perhaps they were preaching doctrinal correctness as opposed to holy living. This was not acceptable to John, who knew the importance and priority of holiness through walking with and listening to Jesus.

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:13-17).

v. 8 – Sin is a product of the devil and his kingdom. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, so anyone who continues to do the devil's work, which is sin, has not comprehended the work of Christ. This can be a confusing concept, for some draw the conclusion that if they sin, then they must not know the Lord. That cannot be true, for John early on in this letter let us know that if anyone denies he or she has sin, they are deceived.

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

v. 9 – Every follower of Christ must experience a definite progress of righteousness as they grow in the Lord. There are attitudes and behaviors that were acceptable ten years ago that are not acceptable today if you are growing in Him. The Holy Spirit continues to work in my life in order to conform me to the image of Christ and to express His righteousness, and I trust He does in yours as well.

Think of where you were five years ago in the Lord; now think of ten years ago. **Can you see that you have grown in your ability to love, be patient, and compassionate? If not, why not? If so, can you look forward to continued growth in grace and holiness?** Of course, you can, for the Lord is at work in you. If you cannot, then John indicated that you do not know the Son, for the goal of discipleship is increasing holiness.

v. 10 – John was not impressed with those who claimed to have special spiritual insight but did not live a holy life. John looked for the fruit of righteousness. If anyone did not love his brother, he was not of God, according to John. If anyone did not bear evidence through holy living that He was a believer, then that person could not claim to be a follower of Christ.

While good works do not save anyone, they certainly provide proof of God's presence in one's life. Yet anyone can sustain good deeds for a season, but there must be ongoing proof of and growth in righteousness caused by the Spirit's presence. Notice that John spoke of the children of the devil. As stated earlier, all the devil can do is imitate. He cannot originate anything. He can only copy what the Lord does and pervert it. There are two kingdoms, one of God and one of the devil, and everyone is in one of those kingdoms. I trust that you have transferred your citizenship to the Lord's kingdom.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

#### Day Four

<sup>11</sup> This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

v. 11 – John transitioned from a discussion of holy living to love, for that was the focus of his work and ministry. He has been referred to as the apostle of love and he gave his readers practical instruction in what he considered holy living: a life of love for one another. That was what John heard from Jesus and what he passed on to others: Love one another.

**Are you growing in love for the family of God? How can you tell? What more can you do? What are you asking the Lord to do in you that would enable you to grow in love, and to express it practically?** My focus as I write in Africa is to help the poor in Africa. I have come to Africa many times, but was not doing much at all to help the poor. I would teach and go home. **How could I continue to see the needs here and not do something to help?** For me, I am working with the Spirit's help on using my administrative and communication gifts to do more for orphans and widows.

I did not initiate that burden, of course, for it was the Lord in me doing so. Yet I am cooperating with this work in my life and actively seeking to carry it out. That is what John was referring to when he wrote about love. **What is your plan these days to carry out his work?**

v. 12 – John warned his readers not to be like Cain! Cain hated his brother, and anyone who hates his brother and sister in Christ is following in Cain’s footsteps. Jesus taught that anyone who hates his brother is guilty of murder, even if that hatred is never voiced or expressed! **Do you have any hatred toward anyone?** You can’t just ignore it and assume that it will go away. You must repent and ask the Lord to change your heart! You cannot even be “neutral” where your brothers are concerned. You must love all, even those who are difficult to love!

Yet John explained that Cain was jealous of his brother because Abel’s actions were righteous and Cain’s were not. So that gave rise to the jealousy and hatred that led to murder.

v. 13 – John likened Cain to the world and Abel to the believer, so the world will hate the believer because that person’s actions are righteous. The world will want what the believer has, but not be willing to repent to receive it. I am noticing how many themes are repeated in this epistle that John also introduced in his gospel, which could be another evidence that John the apostle John wrote this letter.

[All men will hate you because of me \(Luke 21:7\).](#)

**Does it surprise you when someone hates you or your lifestyle simply because you are Christian?** It should not, for Jesus warned you that this would happen.

v. 14 – Hatred leads to death for the hater. John wrote that a believer passes from death to life when he or she loves. When you think of it, love is the trait that the world most looks for in a believer or a church. When that is missing, even the world knows that something is wrong. **Have you passed from death to life?** You have if you love, but not if you only have doctrine that has not affected your lifestyle and heart.

### Day Five

<sup>15</sup>Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

v. 15 – Anyone refers to everyone! If anyone hates, that person is guilty of murder, breaking one of the Ten Commandments. We see much hatred in the world and it almost always ends up badly – wars, genocide, theft, oppression, and racism are just a few expressions of hatred that begin in the heart of men, sometimes even in the heart of one man or woman! Since anyone who murders another is to be put to death, then anyone who has hatred that has not been dealt with cannot have eternal life. So in some sense, hatred takes the life of both the hated and the hater.

v. 16 – Lest anyone get theoretical about what love is exactly, John explained it in terms of the love of Jesus. Jesus laid down His life for others.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. You and I are to do the same for other people, since Jesus gave us this example of supreme and divine love. **Are you laying down your life for others? How can you tell? What evidence is there that you are?** It is easy to say that you love, but sometimes hard to do. John helps us by explaining even more in the next verse.

v. 17 – One practical way to love is to share material possessions with others in need. As I write this, I am in western Kenya on a short-term missions trip with thirteen others. We brought over a lot of books, toys and shoes for the orphans here. While we are here, we are seeing other needs the people have, things like underwear, medicine and food. When we return home, we want to see how we can help meet those needs.

You don't have to give to Africa to help meet needs. There are needs right where you live, even in your own church. Yet God can show you needs anywhere and it is your duty to respond with what you have. You may not think you have anything in your world to give, but that is generally not the case. Ask God to make you sensitive to the needs of those around you. Ask God to open your eyes to see what you have in your heart, basement, garage, attic, closet or checkbook that can be of use to someone else. Teach your children how to be generous. This is the one characteristic of the early church:

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need (Acts 4:34-35).

It does no good to share what you have with someone who cannot use or does not need what you are giving. Love must meet others' needs and not your own need to give. **What practical needs are you meeting from your own possessions? Are you aware of the needs of those around you or of those someplace else in the world? What are you doing to share?** If you need a place to focus your giving, please contact me and I will be glad to give you some suggestions!

### Day Six

<sup>18</sup>Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. <sup>19</sup>This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence <sup>20</sup>whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

v. 18 – Amen, John, Amen! I have found that Christians can be great talkers, even shedding tears. Yet once we have talked, we don't always act. I have heard many people talk about what they will do "one day." Yet this is the day that the Lord has made and we should act today in faith, not talk about tomorrow with hope.

**What good have you said you will do one day that you have not done? What situation have you addressed with words but no action? What missions trip did you say you would take?** You must develop the habit of acting today and not talking about action and thinking you have done something concrete.

v. 19 – You can know that you belong to the truth when you act on what you know you should do, as directed in verse 18. It seems that condemnation comes to all, and the antidote for that is action – doing what you know you should be doing. What a great thought, that your heart can be at rest in God’s presence! That can only happen through the finished work of Christ, who made peace with God for us through the shedding of His blood.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Paul also wrote about the condemnation that we can sense at times because our great adversary accuses us to God:

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me (1 Corinthians 4:4-5).

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down" (Revelation 12:10).

v. 20 – God knows everything, and you must learn to rest in His judgment and not that of your heart or conscience. If your heart condemns you, but God accepts you, then you must make a decision to live in God’s’ perspective and not your own.

### Day Seven

<sup>21</sup> Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God <sup>22</sup> and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. <sup>24</sup> Those who obey his commands live 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.

vs. 21&22 – These verses are in part why I have had trouble understanding John’s epistle over the years. In verse 20, he wrote that we set our hearts at rest when our heart condemns us. Then he wrote that if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God. It seems like he is saying two different things here, at least to me.

Upon closer scrutiny, however, it seems that John was saying if our hearts condemn us, we have a way to alleviate that problem by going to God, who is able to overrule our hearts. If our heart does not condemn us, then we have full confidence before God and

have nothing to stand between us and Him. Either way, John urged his readers to enjoy and enter into the fullness of a robust relationship with the Lord.

John also said that when we have confidence in God and when our heart does not condemn us, we pray and God answers our prayers. We have seen this promise before in the gospels:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24-25).

v. 23 – **What does God command us to do in order to have confidence and have our prayers answered?** We must believe in the name of the Lord Jesus and love one another. **So if your prayers are not being answered, have you put your trust in Jesus and do you love your brothers and sisters?**

v. 24 – If you have faith in Jesus and love the family of God, you abide in Jesus and He lives in you. What's more, you know that He lives in you by the witness of the Spirit of God, who also lives in you!

John indicated that it possible to know that your relationship with the Lord is real and secure. I can only imagine what problem John was addressing as he wrote. We do know that some had broken away from the church and seemed to call into question a true believer's relationship with the Lord. Perhaps they were making that relationship some super-spiritual process that was available only to a certain few. John maintained that faith in Jesus was all that was needed to be part of the body, and proof of that body membership is the love that exists among its members.

It seems that those who left maintained that they led a sinless life and that they were the ones who had the true relationship with God. John again contradicted them by indicating that all people sin, but that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin.

**I wonder how those who left felt when the disciple whom Jesus most loved contradicted everything they were then teaching? Did they feel that John was wrong? Did they repent and come back to the church?** John was clear that he had the truth and those who left did not. He defended the body of Christ from attack and insisted that the way of the apostles was the only way to God through Christ.

It is good to know for certain that there is a specific way to God and John explained the way. People can accept the way or reject it, but they cannot change it, as those who had left the church had tried to do. John would have none of it and laid down the law for all generations to behold.