

1 John

Lesson 4 Chapter 3:1-24

Leader Guide

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Children of God

Lesson 4, 1 John 3:1–10

Prayers

Introduction

In the first two chapters of 1 John, John writes to second-generation Christians experiencing an onslaught of false Christian teaching from teachers within the Church (antichrists) and Greek philosophers. John tells them to test their faith and the teaching they hear against four standards: 1) do they believe in the divinity and humanity of Christ and salvation by faith in Christ alone, 2) do they love others, 3) do they reject worldly standards and love for materialism, 4) and does their faith and teaching leads to righteous living?

In the remaining chapters of 1 John, John gives practical applications of each of these truths in a believer's life. Chapter 3 focuses on obeying God's commands and loving our brothers. Chapter 4 addresses false teaching about Christ, and Chapter 5 closes with declarations of the truth about Christ.

Read 1 John 3:1-10.

^{1Jn 3:1} 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.

^{1Jn 3:2} 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.

^{1Jn 3:3} Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

^{1Jn 3:4} Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

^{1Jn 3:5} But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

^{1Jn 3:6} No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

^{1Jn 3:7} Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

^{1Jn 3:8} 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.

^{1Jn 3:9} 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.

^{1Jn 3:10} 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.

Discuss

1. Verse 1. Gospel writers use Greek words, "uios" and "teknia," to describe our fellowship with God as his children. Paul uses "uios" in Romans 8:14 to describe children legally adopted who enjoy all the same rights and privileges as children born from their parents. Paul discusses the Spirit's work to bring our sinful nature under control to live as children of God. In a similar discussion, John uses "teknia" to refer to naturally born children, not adopted children. Since both naturally born and adopted children are both loved, what insight does John want to emphasize by referring to natural birth rather than legal guardianship?

See also John 3:3

Jn 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Jn 3:4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jn 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Jn 3:6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

John is stressing when we are spiritually reborn; we are God's naturally born children because we have his Spirit alive in us. In verse 9, John writes that we will not continue to sin because of our spiritual rebirth and that God's seed remains in us.

2. Verse 2-3. Even though faith in Christ has made us children of God, we are still works in progress. Paul wrote that we are being transformed into his [Christ's] likeness with ever-increasing glory. We will not be made complete until Christ comes again or until we meet him in heaven. What attributes of Christ do you most desire; new body, wisdom, power of healing, prayer? What characteristic does John say we should desire, and what is our response?

Verse 3 John says we should desire purity (or holiness, righteousness).

3. Jesus took away our sins. There is no sin in him. What does this motivate us to do (verses 4–6)?

Jesus' sacrifice should motivate us not to keep sinning and reflect on the hope we have in him.

4. Verse 7-8. John references the false teachers of Gnosticism who were leading people astray. Two false doctrines were that 1) man is spiritual, so what we do in the body is of no consequence, and 2) there is no such thing as sin or sinful action, only greater or lesser stages of intellectual enlightenment. What does John say about people who follow these teachings?

¹Jn 3:7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

¹Jn 3:8 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.

Sin is real and was the reason Christ became incarnate!

5. Verses 3:9-10 are some of the most convicting verses in scripture because we all sin in both actions and thoughts. After reading 1 John 3, we might think that John is giving us reason to doubt our salvation and union with Christ. 1 John 3:9-10 must be read in the context of his introduction in 1 John 1: 9-20 and 2:1. Read the following passages and summarize in your own words what John is teaching about sin and a Christian's walk in Christ.

¹Jn 3:9 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. ¹Jn 3:10 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.

¹Jn 1:8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

^{1Jn 1:9} If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ^{1Jn 1:10} If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

^{1Jn 2:1} My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ^{1Jn 2:2} He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Discussion

John tells us not to sin because we are born again, and God's Spirit is in us. John also acknowledges that we all sin and must confess our sins. We cannot help but despair for our sins, but we also need to be at peace. It is only through the transformation by the Holy Spirit that we overcome sin. Secondly, Christ's sacrifice for us is sufficient – our sins are forgiven and forgotten.

We all sin, and all sin is sin. But are there sins that would indicate that our faith and Christian profession are not true? Paul warned the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 5-6 that there are sins Christians cannot do and still call themselves Christians. The sins Paul mentions are idolatry, sexual immorality, wickedness, and greed. These sins are similar to John's tests of genuine faith and clarify the practices the apostles were preaching against in the early church. Paul said no Christian could worship false gods (the first commandment). Christians were to expel other Christians from their fellowship who engaged in pagan worship.

Regarding loving your neighbor, Paul taught that a Christian could not sin against his brother by slander, thievery, swindling, and greed and call himself a Christian. Paul also needed to address sexual immorality in the church because some engaged in incest, adultery, prostitution, and homosexuality.

Paul and John used the same standards to test genuine faith; love for Christ and love for your neighbor.

Read 1 John 3:11-24

^{1Jn 3:11} This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

^{1Jn 3:12} 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.

^{1Jn 3:13} Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

^{1Jn 3:14} We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

^{1Jn 3:15} Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

^{1Jn 3:16} 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.

^{1Jn 3:17} 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?

^{1Jn 3:18} Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

^{1Jn 3:19} This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ^{1Jn 3:20} whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

^{1Jn 3:21} Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ^{1Jn 3:22} and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

^{1Jn 3:23} And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

^{1Jn 3:24} 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.

Discuss

6. John begins his discussion in verse 12 on what it means to love your brother with the story of Cain and Able, the oldest recorded murder in the Bible. The reason for the LORD's disfavor with Cain's sacrifice is not apparent in the Genesis account but is revealed in Hebrews. What were Cain's sins before he committed murder?

^{Ge 4:2} Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ^{Ge 4:3} In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ^{Ge 4:4} But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ^{Ge 4:5} but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

^{Heb 11:4} By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

Hebrews says Cain's sacrifice was not pleasing to God because he lacked faith. Cain was jealous of his brother when he saw that God was pleased by his younger brother's offering. God came to counsel Cain and warned him that his sin was ready to consume him.

7. Verse 13. Why shouldn't we be surprised to encounter hatred toward us for being Christians?

The world rejects Christ and also rejects his followers.

8. **Verses 16-18.** What are tests of true love toward your brother?

^{1Jn 3:16} 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.

^{1Jn 3:17} 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?

^{1Jn 3:18} Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

We may not be called to give up our lives for others. Yet notice how John follows the verse about our giving up our lives. We give up our lives when we provide for our brothers and sisters physical and material needs, not merely with words but also by deeds.

9. Verses 19-24. John must have known that no believer could read his words on not sinning without feeling guilt, so he offers assurance in verses 19-24. What is our confidence before God when we feel guilt and shame?

^{1Jn 3:19} This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ^{1Jn 3:20} whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

^{1Jn 3:21} Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ^{1Jn 3:22} and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

^{1Jn 3:23} And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

^{1Jn 3:24} 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.

God is a better judge of our hearts than we are. We have confidence before God because we believe in his son Jesus Christ. Our love for Christ leads us to obey his commands and to love others.

Closing Prayer and Blessing