

## 16. The Epistle of 1 John—3:15-20

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### 1 John 3:13-15 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

I realize that most people when they read this (verse 15) would probably think—“*I have never murdered anyone!*”

However, they are either ignorant of or have forgotten what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:22) that—God doesn't only consider the outward actions of a person's life as sin but also the inward attitudes of their heart!

All sin begins in the heart with a thought or desire—and God looks upon the heart so that even if they never actually murder anyone, if they have harbored hatred in the heart towards another person—in the eyes of God they *have* committed murder against them.

Also, please don't misunderstand what John is saying here. He *is not* saying that a murderer *cannot* be saved—but that a saved man cannot *continue* as a murderer.

➔ Story of professional assassin who became a Christian; and also, a mafia hit man.

### 1 John 3:16 (NKJV)

<sup>16</sup> By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

In saying this, John no doubt had in mind the words of Jesus in the upper room the night before His crucifixion which He spoke during the Last Supper—

### John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

The word “**new**” does not mean “*new in time*,” since God had commanded His people to love others in the Old Testament before Jesus came on the scene—this Greek word means “*new in experience, fresh*.”

This command for the disciples to love one another was new because it was built on a new *principle* and energized by a new *power* (Holy Spirit).

- **The new principle**— “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you...” (John 13:34)

In the Old Testament, God had commanded His people to love others “*as they loved themselves*” (‘as much as themselves’).” (Verse 19:18)

What makes this command **new** is that Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other “*as He loved them.*”

How did Jesus love them? How did Jesus love us?—by going to the Cross and dying for us!

**John 15:12-13 (NKJV)**

<sup>12</sup> This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

That’s how He wants us to love one another—by going to the Cross and dying (not literally but dying to self) for one another—that’s what’s new about His command to love! Yes, the Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love—but Jesus here makes everything new when He says, “**Love one another as I have loved you**” or in other words—**love others sacrificially.**

Under Old Testament law, God commanded His people that they love others “*as they loved themselves*” (‘as much as’)—under the New Covenant, He commanded His Church to love others *more* than we love ourselves (dying to self to put their needs before our own).

**1 John 3:16-18 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. <sup>17</sup> **But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?** <sup>18</sup> **My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**

God’s love (agape) isn’t just words and feelings—it’s actions (the definition of God’s love in 1 Corinthians 13 contains all verbs).

Agape love is *action* based not *feelings* based—“*for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*”. (John 3:16) John says that true Christians love other Christians—but not just theoretically or verbally—they love them actually and tangibly.

**James 2:15-16 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit?

“*Yes, but I can’t help everyone in need!*”—that’s true, and God is not expecting you to help *everyone* in need—only those He brings across your path and lays on your heart to help.

**Proverbs 19:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.

Remember, God’s love is kind, generous, merciful and compassionate—it helps those in need. Now, that doesn’t mean we reward laziness or irresponsibility—

**2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

Paul isn't condemning those who *can't* work because of sickness, injury or handicap. Nor is he condemning those who want to work but are in between jobs but are looking and praying like crazy for a job. He is condemning those who *won't* work (not "O, I want a job and I'm waiting for God to give me one") and in the meantime they're sponging off of others in the church. (Elaborate)

Look, it has always been my personal policy and our church policy to err on the side of grace.

In other words, if you're not sure if this person's financial problems are due to irresponsibility and/or laziness—go ahead and help them. Even if you *are* sure they've been lazy or irresponsible and there are children involved—help them for the sake of the kids.

I am blessed to be a part of a church family that truly loves one another. I have seen God's love working through you many times in tangible ways when someone was in need.

**1 John 3:19 (NKJV)**

**<sup>19</sup> And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.**

**"And by this we know that we are of the truth (genuinely saved)"**—refers to what John has just said in verses 17–18 that—tangible demonstrations of love towards other Christians in need, shows that someone is a Christian indeed!

Once again, loving Christians (tangibly) is something John continually points to as an evidence that they are genuinely saved.

Gayle Erwin tells a wonderful story about a man he knew when he was a boy—the man's name was Jake. He said that Jake was the meanest, drunkest, man in town.

*"He would come to church from time to time, but that was only to beat up the elders. One Wednesday night, Jake came to church—but not to beat anybody up. Remarkably, Jake gave his life to Jesus. He walked down the aisle of the little church and kneeled down at the altar. The next night there was another meeting at the church, and the pastor asked if anyone wanted to share what God was doing in their lives. Jake stood up, and said: "I have something to say. Last night when I came here, I hated you people." Heads nodded in agreement. "But something happened to me and I don't understand this, but tonight I love you."*

This is a divine, supernatural love that the Holy Spirit plants in the heart of every believer for other believers, and as John tells us—it is a wonderful assurance that we are born again.

As we said to start our study in First John, John wrote his Gospel so that people might be *saved* (20:30-31)—and he wrote his first epistle so that they, who have received Jesus as their Savior, might *know* (have the assurance) they are saved.

**1 John 5:13 (NKJV)**

**<sup>13</sup> These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue* to believe in the name of the Son of God.**

So, assurance is vitally important in the lives of all of God's children—essential for their victory, fruitfulness and service for God. That's why the writers of the New Testament admonish us to take spiritual inventory of our lives to make sure we are genuinely saved—

## **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

**“Disqualified”** is a Greek word that means—*“having been proven worthless—‘of no value’—or in other words, ‘having proven the worthlessness of their ‘so-called faith’, that they were never a genuine Christian.”*

Again, the way you do that is by examining your current life and comparing it with your life before you prayed to receive Christ as your Savior. Is there a change in the way you approach life now, in how you think, and in what you value—and most importantly, has your life changed in the way you’re now living it?

Someone who is genuinely saved will undergo a transformation in how they think, how they talk, how they live and with whom they associate with that will be—an unmistakable testimony that they are saved and being transformed by the Holy Spirit who is now living inside them.

This self-examination is vital because there are many attending churches across our country who think that as long as they believe the facts of the Gospel that makes them a Christian—and yet Jesus said we would know true Christians from phony Christians—by their “fruit” (Matthew 12:33)

James, repeating the Lord’s sentiment using different words, put it this way—

## **James 2:17, 26 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> ...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead...<sup>26</sup> For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Now, here’s the thing about assurance—it can be wiped-out , destroyed through legalism. Many pastors and church leaders in their zeal to see their people walking with God and bearing fruit—place them under the law.

In other words, they tell them that unless they are constantly doing good works (going to church, giving money to God and not smoking, drinking, going to movies, or dressing and looking inappropriately (however they define it)—that they are either fake Christians or Christians who have lost their salvation and need to be saved again.

This constant emphasis on works (and the corresponding condemnation that often accompanies it) robs them of the assurance of their salvation and the joy that comes from the knowledge that they are saved, sustained and eternally secured by God’s grace—not by their works. (Galatians 3:1-3)

## **1 John 3:19-20 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> **And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.** <sup>20</sup> **For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.**

Sometimes, a Christian, who goes to a church that does teach grace and not law will still battle with condemnation. This is often the result of them having a tender heart towards God and a tendency to be too hard on themselves—constantly thinking they’re a failure as a Christian.

A Christian that is still young in the faith is often susceptible to the devil’s condemnation.

Not having had time to grow in their faith and knowledge of the Word—they are still a ‘baby Christian’, and as such ignorant as to what God’s Word teaches about His grace which allows the devil to use their tender but immature heart to condemn them.

While they cannot lose their salvation (if they are truly saved), they can begin to lose the *assurance* of that salvation due to a heart (conscience) that keeps condemning them. John comforts them by saying that “**if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things**”.

Let me say that there is a difference between Spirit directed *conviction* and Satan directed *condemnation*.

God’s conviction drives us to Him to get our lives right when we’ve committed sin—whereas Satan’s condemnation drives us away from God. (Comment)

God’s conviction is tied to our *conscience* which in turn is connected to His laws which He has written in our hearts—in all of our hearts not just believers hearts:

**Romans 2:14-15 (NLT2)**

<sup>14</sup> Even Gentiles, who do not have God’s written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. <sup>15</sup> They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right.

Conviction is triggered through guilt—guilt being the ‘alarm-system’ God has put in place to warn us when we have violated one His commandments.

When Christians (or unbelievers) violate one of God’s laws they feel guilty which is God’s way of warning them they have broken one of His commandments and need to repent and get right with Him before He imposes judgment (punishment) of some kind upon them.

As I just said, guilt is the alarm that begins to sound in their heart that they have done something wrong—something God has forbidden.

Yet, since most people can’t live with guilt (it makes them uncomfortable), if they refuse to repent then they will inevitably try to alleviate it by justifying their sin, excusing it in some way or even by blaming someone else for the wrong they have done.

After a while this becomes *reflexive* whenever they violate God’s commandments until they ‘short-circuit’ their conscience and render it inoperative. When a person effectively ‘turns off’ their conscience, they are ‘flying-blind’ morally and will crash and burn—it will only be a matter of time.

Again, the way you switch off your conscience is to ignore it by justifying why what you’re doing is not wrong—I mean “*every body’s doing it and it feels right so it can’t be wrong*” ...

Eventually this leads to, as Paul put it in 1 Timothy 4:2, our conscience being ‘seared as with a hot iron’. (Explain)

The more people in a society do this, the more that society will become wicked and rebellious toward God and all those that God has placed in authority over them (parents, teachers, police, husbands etc.)

The result is unbridled sin, violence and rebellion at every level of society—especially in the last days—

**2 Timothy 3:1-4 (NLT)**

<sup>1</sup> You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. <sup>2</sup> For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and

ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred.<sup>3</sup> They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good.<sup>4</sup> They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God... [Folks, that is the evening news!]

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