

## Bible Study for February 12, 2020

Tim Keown of ESPN the Magazine wrote in an article several years ago of a diverse group of individuals united by their love of the San Francisco Giants. This group of season ticket holders to Section 135 at AT&T Park have become deeply involved in one another's lives. Keown writes: "These folks were complete strangers before baseball intervened; now they celebrate births, mourn deaths and mark the passage of time by baseball milestones." After describing some of the ways in which the fans in Section 135 care for one another, Keown asks,

Where else can you find camaraderie like this? Where else can people gather and share this much life? In your neighborhood? Chances are, the folks next door and across the street are too consumed with their jobs and their kids and their bills to sit around together for three hours 81 times a year. At the office? It's unlikely that corporate hierarchies and petty infighting could ever be dropped long enough to foster the kind of egalitarian bonhomie found in and around 135.

Where indeed?

Twelve times the exact phrase "love one another" appears in the New Testament. John begins this section with reminder that this command is a central theme of Christianity since it first came from the lips of Jesus during his earthly ministry. This phrase is a command for all believers and is therefore not optional. It is in the present tense which means we should continuously display love in the family of God.

I don't think I need to convince Christians of the validity of this command. John didn't think so either. He frankly stated the command with the reminder that this came first from the lips of Jesus in John 13:34-35. The day before He was crucified He said to His disciples:

A new commandment I give to you, That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

No, I don't need to convince you of the importance of this command. But, I do think sometimes we find it hard to put this command into practice. This is precisely where John's teaching in this passage is so helpful. Here he breaks down what it means to love one another by showing us: *what it is not, what it proves, what it is and what it looks like.*

### **"Love One Another:" What It's Not** *Read vv. 12-13*

In verse 12 John offers an illustration of what loving one another is not. The opposite of loving one another is the hatred that was in the heart of Cain which caused him to murder his brother. This negative illustration is the only reference to the Old Testament (Gen. 4) in this epistle. Cain's name is the only proper name given in this book, besides God and Jesus. But this account is given in order for us to see, in all of its horror, the result that comes when we fail to love one another.

John raises and then answers the question of why Cain killed his brother Abel. His works were evil and his brother's were righteous. This no doubt led to jealousy which led to hate which led to murder. The Song of Solomon 8:6 states that "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame."

Unchecked jealousy is one of the leading causes of domestic violence and murder around the world. According to an AP story the shooting rampage in WV several years ago where six people were gunned down was fueled by jealousy." The 22 year old shooter later took his own life in Lewis County, Kentucky.

Are you allowing jealousy to creep into your life toward another believer? Maybe it's a coworker, a neighbor, or a friend who seems to get more attention than you. Jealousy leads to hate which leads to murder with your attitude if not with your actions. And hate is the opposite of what we are called to as believers. *Not only does John tell us what "love one another" is not, he also tells us what loving one another proves.*

### **"Love One Another:" What It Proves** *Read vv. 14-15*

Since the world is characterized by hatred, love for the brethren (i.e., fellow believers) is evidence that an individual has experienced a spiritual resurrection. Believers have passed from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life which results in a turning from hate to love. A lack of love indicates that one is spiritually dead. Love is the sure test of whether someone has experienced the new birth or is still in the darkness of spiritual death.

Love is the supreme manifestation of the new life, so much so that anyone who fails to manifest it shows that he has never entered into the new life. The verb "to love" in the expression "because we love the brethren" like in the phrase "love one another" in v. 11 is in the present tense which indicates that the author is stressing an ongoing love for fellow believers. This is the evidence that one has passed from death to life spiritually.

**Weekly Bible Study  
meets on Wednesday at  
two times (11:30-12 and  
12-12:30). Both in  
Capitol Annex 436 or, if  
occupied, the 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
lounge (404).**

Eternal life is not earned by loving the brethren. Rather, loving the brethren is evidence that one has passed from death to life. 1 John is about assurance for believers, not about how we can earn our salvation. The conjunction “because” in the middle of v. 14 modifies the verb “we know” and not the verb “we have passed.”

The end of v. 14 states the negative side of this test. If you don’t love the brethren, you are spiritually dead. Verse 15 explains: Hate equals murder and murder is incompatible with eternal life. Hatred is spiritually the same as murder in the eyes of God because the attitude is equal to the act. Hatred is the desire to get rid of someone, whether or not someone has the nerve or opportunity to perform the actual murder. So, the proof of whether one has eternal life is whether or not one loves the brethren.

Is everyone here breathing? If you are, then you are alive. If not, you are dead. In a similar way, love for the brethren indicates that we are spiritually alive. And, just as our breathing isn’t the cause of our life (our parents had something to do with that), neither is our loving the cause of our spiritual life. But we can examine ourselves to see if we are alive. Are you alive? Do you love the brethren? If you do, that is evidence of spiritual life. If not, that is evidence of spiritual death.

*After telling us what loving one another is not and what it proves, John is now ready to show us what it is.*

### **“Love One Another:” What It Is** *Read v. 16*

The way John shows us what love is, is by pointing to the cross. The cross of Calvary is the supreme manifestation of love in human history. We know this from the other John 3:16 which says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This is also clearly taught in Romans 5:8 which says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is the standard of love in genuine Christianity. The cross is the measuring stick for every expression of love.

When John speaks of love (*agape*), it is no sentimental emotion that he has in mind, but something intensely practical. This love always expresses itself. In John 3:16 . . . In Romans 5:8 . . . And in this verse, Jesus is said to lay down His life for us. That expression speaks of divesting oneself of something. It is a self-sacrificial, giving love.

John’s reason for pointing to the cross was not for salvation, but for illustration. He wants to show us what real love is. However, anyone here who believes the truth contained in this verse will be an heir of salvation. If you believe that Jesus Christ “laid down His life” for you, then you’ll be saved. But John’s point is to illustrate the nature of true love. It is seen in the fact that Jesus Christ self-sacrificially gave His own life for us!

John then says “And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” By this he means we should be willing to give self-sacrificially of ourselves to fellow believers in Christ. God calls Christians to the same standard for one another as He had toward us.

*The natural question that follows this verse is “How do I do that?” Am I to be crucified on a hill in Israel? What does this love look like? That is the question which John answers in v. 17.*

### **“Love One Another:” What It Looks Like** *Read v. 17*

John makes this very specific for us, doesn’t he? Notice how focused v. 17 is on the individual. He first says “whoever.” This is the individual Christian. He then says “brother” instead of “brethren” as was used in the rest of this passage. This change from plural to singular is deliberate and significant because it makes the duty of helping a fellow member of the body of Christ more to the individual.

As C. S. Lewis observed:

It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital ‘H’ than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular.

As Christians, we’re quick to say we love everybody, but do we love anybody. We say we love the world but do we love the individual. I’m glad that God loves the world but I’m also glad He loves me individually. John shows us what it looks like to love another individual. He actually shows us what it doesn’t look like. But the point is that we see what it should look like.

What does it look like? It has hands to help others, feet to hasten to the poor and needy, eyes to see misery and want, ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like. *Augustine*

#### **1. It has Open Eyes**

To see the needs around us. Do you know the physical, spiritual, emotional, financial state of the person that you’re sitting beside, in front of, behind, across the table from? We need to see people’s needs with the view of meeting those needs.

#### **2. It has an Open Heart**

The example in v. 17 that doesn’t have God’s love in him, shuts his heart, but the true believer who has the love of God in his heart opens that heart to others. The verb that is used here “closes” suggests a deliberate neglect in spite of what has been seen. It literally means “to close or lock a door.” A.T. Robertson said that it is the slamming of the door in the face of another’s need. That’s not Christian love. Christian love has open eyes to see the needs around us and Christian love has an open heart to meet the needs around us.

Verses 17 and 18 are a powerful conclusion to this passage. Cf. James 2:15-16. Back to Tim Keown’s question: Where else can you find camaraderie like this? Christians aren’t united because they cheer for same teams or part of same political party, but because of Jesus.