

February 17, 2019

1 John 3:11-24

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

First John is written as a sermon with the key purpose to defend Christian communities against false prophets and to remind them that as children of God they are to live in the light and love one another. The distracting teaching is rooted in doctism: the ancient belief, common in Greco-Roman culture, in the superiority of everything that is “spiritual” over the “physical”. It led to much debate and division in the church over the nature of Jesus as God (leading to the adoption of first great Christian Creeds: The Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds). This worldview taught by these false prophets also seemed to imply that there is no connection between our spiritual-ity (beliefs) and physical actions (ethics). The pastoral author writes to counter that false teaching, reminding the church of what it means to be a child of God, and to see in Christ the invisible God, modeling our lives – spiritual and physical – on his life and example. Love is more than a feeling, it’s a concrete action. Confessing belief in Christ and living rooted in God’s love is inseparable from loving as Christ loves: being willing to give life for one in need, to lay aside our self-concern to choose to obey love.⁸

Verse 11 is very similar to 1 John 1:5. Whereas the latter has God as the subject, here the subject moves to us; insisting upon our actions & choices. “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.”

message: the word here in Greek is *angelia*, related to the Greek word for gospel (or good news) *yuangelion*. This message to love is an essential part of the gospel.

from the beginning ἀρχῆς : [Arche] is the Greek word "beginning", "origin" or "source of action" used in Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning when God created ...” and John 1:1 : “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” It also goes back to 1 John 1:1 “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.” It points back to the tradition-creating teaching of Jesus in John 13:34-35 “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” and also in John 15:12, 17 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

ἈΒΙΔΕ: this word is heavily used in the letter, pointing back to a metaphor first used by Jesus of the mutual love seen in how a vine and its branches are connected and interdependent. “⁴ ἈΒΙΔΕ in me as I ἈΒΙΔΕ in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it ἈΒΙΔΕ in the vine, neither can you unless you ἈΒΙΔΕ in me.⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who ἈΒΙΔΕ in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:4-5

All who hate : this points back to the antichrists, those who follow the example of Cain, taking life rather than giving it, first talked of in 1 John 2:18-27 those who deny that Jesus is the Christ and in doing so deny the Father.

lay down our lives for one another: this expression is only found here ...

¹¹ For this is the *message* you have heard from the beginning, that we should **LOVE** one another. ¹² We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. ¹³ Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the **world** hates you. ¹⁴ We *know* that we have passed from death to life because we **LOVE** one another. Whoever does not **LOVE** ἈΒΙΔΕ in death. ¹⁵ All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life ἈΒΙΔΙΝΓ in them. ¹⁶ We *know* **LOVE** by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God’s **LOVE** ἈΒΙΔΕ in anyone who has the world’s **GOODS** and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ **Little children**, let us **LOVE**, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we **OBEY** his **COMMANDMENTS** and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his **COMMANDMENT**, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and **LOVE** one another, just as he has **COMMANDED** us. ²⁴ All who **OBEY** his **COMMANDMENTS** λ BID ϵ in him, and he λ BID ϵ S in them. And by this we know that he λ BID ϵ S in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Genesis 4:1-8

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¹ Now the man [Adam] knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." ² Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ⁶ The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What shimmers in your attention in this reading?**
- **What have you been taught or heard that it means to obey God? How has that given you life?; or distracted you from life? Or maybe both? Obedience means compliance with an order, request, or law or submission to another's authority. How does submission to Christ shape and transform us?; How has it you in your own life?**
- **The text clearly associates Jesus with love and life, whereas hatred and death are associated with Cain. How where and when are you more attracted to the example of Cain, to refusing compassion, shutting your heart off to those in need?**
- **What invitation to act, speak or be do you hear in today's scripture?**

and in John 10:11-18 & 15:13. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep..." "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

GOODS: The Greek word used here βίον is often translated as wealth. Luke 15:12 & 30

The use of **COMMANDMENT**, λ BID ϵ , **LOVE**, **world**, from the beginning in the text are strongly related to their original use in the gospel of John, specifically John 15.

OBEY obedience means speaking and acting correctly. It's a coherence between what we believe and how we walk (act). Obedience is portrayed less as ascribing to certain formulas of statements of faith in order to be in relationship with God, than as seeking to live as Christ lived: loving to the extend of being willing to lay down one's life for another – as he did. No one can be commanded to think or feel a particular thing, but we can be invited to grow in a particular direction, transformed and shaped by relationship and the example of another.

COMMANDMENTS: The author goes from the singular to the plural, from the "old" to the "new": from the traditional 10 commandments to the summary Jesus in the gospels in which he says that the greatest commandment is : "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."Mark 12:28-31

Here the author redefines the **COMMANDMENTS** as believing in Jesus as the Christ and loving one another. We are not **COMMANDED** to feel love but to act lovingly. What's most important is not that love is made into **COMMANDMENT** but that the **COMMANDMENT** is love.

³ In my notes, I borrowed freely from *Seek. Find.: The Bible for All People* (The Contemporary English Version) ABS 2006 and *The Epistles of John*. David Resenberg. Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.