

Lesson for October 23, 2005

The Book of I John

Chapter 3:14-18

Verse 14

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.
He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.”

When we examine ourselves as believers, a true test of our level of maturity is whether or not we are able to exhibit divine impersonal love for our fellow believers. Since all believers are part of the family of God, it makes perfect sense that we should naturally love those who are a part of our family. This does not mean that we *personally* love everyone. It does mean that we are to operate in *impersonal* love toward all people, especially those who are part of our Christian family.

The Greek word for both deaths in this verse is “thanatos” and means separation. The first “death” in this verse is an obvious reference to spiritual death (separation from God for all eternity) and *life* refers to eternal life. (Ephesians 2:1; Romans 5:12, 6:23; John 3:16) The “love test” is an indication that we have the life of God within us. An unbeliever cannot exhibit divine love.

The second “death” in this verse refers to the temporal death of the believer. Temporal death is defined as a believer out of fellowship with God and controlled by his sin nature. (Romans 8:6,13; Ephesians 5:14; I Timothy 5:6; James 1:15; Revelation 3:1; I John 3:14)

The inability to exhibit divine impersonal love toward a fellow believer is an indication that the believer is out of fellowship with God or in a state of temporal death. As an advancing believer you may have the doctrinal information resident in your soul with regard to impersonal love. You may be able to define it, recite passages that refer to it and know how to apply it. However, if you are out of fellowship with God you have no power to apply it.

Verse 15

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and we know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”

Can a believer hate another person to the point of murder and still possess eternal life? The answer is yes. This verse does not say that a murderer cannot have eternal life or that a believer cannot commit murder.

John is once again contrasting the life within God's power system with the life within Satan's cosmic system. The contrast is between hatred (Satan's system) and love (God's system). Jesus did say in the Gospels that a person who hates his brother without cause has already committed murder in his heart. This satanic attitude of hatred is not from God and will not be exhibited by a person who is in fellowship with God (being controlled by the Holy Spirit). "Has eternal life abiding in him" means that God's life continues to be operational in a believer..

Verse 16

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

The Greek word for *perceive* is "ginosko" and means to know by experience or observation. John could perceive the love of God by first-hand observation and experience. John observed the impeccability of Jesus Christ, observed the miracles He performed and ultimately watched as Christ was crucified. John understood the love of God in a way few others could. Now you and I can understand that same great love from the study of God's Word.

God's love for us should be the motivating factor in all that we do. John uses the love of fellow believers as one of the results of this motivation. This is the antithesis of hatred. Both hatred and love can be motivators. Hatred can motivate a person to commit murder. Love can motivate a person to lay down his life for another. Once again, we see the contrast between operating in God's power system and operating in Satan's cosmic system.

Verse 17

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

In the previous verse, John tells us that we should be willing to lay down our lives for a fellow believer. If, as John suggests, we should be willing to lay down our lives, then it follows that we would be willing to do the lesser deed of showing compassion. For the believer with the means to help others, he can demonstrate his impersonal love by helping believers in need.

Having “the world’s good” is a reference to having the means to assist others. *Bowels* and *compassion* are the same Greek word “splanchnon”, which means to have affection, to have mercy or to be moved emotionally. A believer with divine love operating in his life will not ignore opportunities to produce divine good when he has the means (resources given to him by God). He will demonstrate his love by his deeds.

How do we show the World our faith? This question is answered in James 2. The answer, of course, is by divine production. Divine production begins with Divine Viewpoint Thinking. The World cannot see your thinking. It can, however, see the *results* of your thinking. Therefore, if we are to be testimonies for Jesus Christ, people must see the character of Jesus Christ in our actions.

James asked, “What advantage does it bring a believer in Jesus Christ, though a person say that he has faith, without accompanying deeds? Can faith deliver him?” Deliver him from what is the question? In context (James 2:1-13), the deliverance is from being a respecter of persons, from being judgmental and from showing no mercy. Therefore, what we have is application of our faith. “Faith” can be the body of doctrine that we believe to be true or it can be the act of believing. In either case, we are talking about applying what you know.

Verse 18

“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

John continues his thought by reemphasizing the necessity of demonstrating our love by our deeds (divine production) and accurate doctrine (truth). Impersonal love has been defined as how we regard and treat others. Therefore, mere mental assent or verbal assent to loving others is not enough for the advancing believer. The advancing believer must understand the doctrine of impersonal love and its proper application.

These outward demonstrations of our impersonal love as Royal Ambassadors are the result of a maturing relationship with God as Royal Priests. Attempting to demonstrate impersonal love toward others without the development of personal love for God leads to legalism, lack of divine production, and at best, production of human good.

Personal and Impersonal Love

God loves you and me because He has integrity; you can love Him in return when you acquire Christian integrity. *Christian integrity* is defined as a strict adherence or loyalty to the truth, soundness of moral principle, and a state of honesty and uncorrupted virtue as found in the Word of God. *Virtue* is defined as strength of character exhibited in such characteristics as stability, courage, capability, worthiness, honor, high moral standards, kindness, humility, faithfulness, and patience. *Christian virtue* refers to these qualities in a person as God designed him to be.

Virtue in the Christian life can be produced only under the control of the Holy Spirit by maximum application of the Word of God. The believer needs a power greater than himself in order to acquire and apply virtue. He needs the same power that our Lord Jesus Christ had while here on earth. Remember, Jesus pioneered the Christian life for us while being tested in every way that we are tested, except without sin. (I John 4:9; II Peter 1:2-4)

The Greek word "Arete" is translated "virtue" in English. Paul uses this word in Philippians 4:8-9 and tells us that we as believers should be concentrating on the qualities from the Word of God that develop virtue. Christian virtue is *not* avoidance of a set of taboos laid down by some religious organization. *Christian virtue is forming and exhibiting the character of Jesus Christ by consistent intake and application of Bible doctrine, which is the mind of Christ.* (Philippians 2:5)

Impersonal love is how we are able to love all mankind and functions on the basis of the integrity and virtue from God resident in our soul. Impersonal love grows in direct proportion to the growth of the believer's spiritual life. (I John 4:8)

Growing up spiritually requires the use or application of what you have learned. This means we need to train ourselves, replace old bad habits with new habits consistent with our new spiritual nature. We accomplish this under the control and guidance of God the Holy Spirit. When this occurs, the Holy Spirit is able to produce the character of Jesus Christ in us. Personal love for God and impersonal love for all people are characteristics of Jesus Christ.

(II Corinthians 5:17; Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 5:14)