

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
April 11, 2010

Love within the Community

1 John 2:9-11, 15-17

Key verse: “Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling” (1 John 2:10).

The New Testament book of 1 John weaves together three great themes that reoccur throughout the book: *God is life, God is light, God is love*. These themes are found in this week’s texts, but they are presented here with a very specific, practical focus: *one’s love for God is demonstrated by one’s love for people (2:9-11) and by one’s love for godly values as opposed to “worldly” values (2:15-17).*

1. One’s love for God is demonstrated by one’s love for people (2:9-11).

In this second chapter, John tells us that what we say we know or believe about God is connected to (or proven by) how we actually live our lives. In other words, John tells us, knowing and loving God is more than just talking about it. John gets even more pointed when he says, “This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did” (2:6).

If life in Christ involves walking “as Jesus did,” or imitating Christ, that certainly will mean learning to love others as Jesus loves others. So, John draws this stark contrast: If one says he or she loves God, yet hates others, he “is still in the darkness” (v. 9). On the other hand, if one truly loves others, his faith is authentic—he “lives in the light” (v. 10).

Further, John speaks of the spiritual blindness that results when one chooses not to love: That person, John says, “walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness” (v. 11). Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, warned of this danger when he said: “See to it that he who hurts you does not cause you to become evil like him...for he is the victor who changes another man to become like himself when he himself remains unchanged.” In other words, when we respond to evil with love, we become more like Christ, but when we respond to evil with hate, we become like the evil that we hate.

2. One’s love for God is demonstrated by one’s love for godly values as opposed to “worldly” values (2:15-17).

Next, John tells us, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world” (2:15). To understand this verse, we

must understand what John means by the “world.” John does not mean the physical world that God created and said of it, it is “good.” Nor does John mean the *people* who populate our planet, for John has just made the point that we are to love people. John uses the word “world” here to refer to *the present world system* with its values that so often are contrary to God’s values.

John is describing a worldly value system which he explains with two other words: “desire” (or lust) and “pride.” Desires run amuck (or lust) and self-centered pride (or arrogance) are not from God, but instead characterize the value system John has in mind when he speaks of “the world’: “for all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world” (v. 16).

Money, sex, power, success—these are powerful forces that, unless controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit, can lead us away from God and God’s love. We all have known people who have fallen in love with “the world” and lost their love for God. The Bible tells such a story about a man named Demas.

The apostle Paul first mentions Demas as one of the believers who had helped him and worked with him for the cause of Christ. Later, however, Paul mentions Demas, in the last chapter of 2 Timothy, with these sad words: “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.” Evidently, Demas lost his love for Christ because he let himself be captured with love for the things of the world. And as John tell us, “The love of the Father is not in those who love the world” (v. 15).

Not only is love for the “world” dangerous because it is incompatible with love for God. Love for the “world,” John tells us, is ultimately love that is wasted—“the world and its desire are passing away” (v. 17a). On the other hand, John assures us, when we love and live for God and the will of God, we are investing our lives in something that will last for eternity: “...those who do the will of God live forever” (v. 17b).

Vance Havner, the evangelist, told the story of a man he knew from rural Tennessee, Homer Hammontree. Havner describes his friend Homer as a deeply committed Christian who, though never rich or famous by worldly standards, made a difference in the lives of many by his dynamic Christian witness.

When Homer died, he was buried in the hills of Tennessee, near his little hometown of Greenback. Some years later, Havner was preaching in that area. One day he asked his host, “Where is Greenback, Tennessee?”

He said, “Oh, it’s not far from here.”

Havner said, “Let’s go over there.”

They found the country cemetery, and they found Homer’s grave there. Homer had never married. He was buried alone under a big oak tree, and on his tombstone were these words: “The world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever” (1 John 2:17).

Havner concluded his account of that experience by saying: “Those that do the will of God.’ That’s success. That’s fulfillment. If a man has missed that, he’s failed, though his corpse be housed in the stateliest mausoleum. If he does God’s will, he’s a success, though he rest at the finish in a country churchyard out in the hills.” (from a sermon by Vance Havner titled, “A Holy Man of God Passed By”)
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