

## Love in 1 John (Part 1)

Though 1 John is a fairly small letter, it has a whole lot to say about the subject of love. Throughout the letter John explains what love is and how love is an essential characteristic of true believers. The love he describes is not a sentimental or romantic type of love; rather, it is an active love that obeys God's commands and puts the other person before oneself. The following are insights about love found in 1 John.

If you do not love your brother, then you do not belong to God. 1 John 2.9-11 reads, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him." When John speaks of your "brother," he is referring to fellow believers. And he says if we do not love fellow believers, then we are still in the darkness and thus still in our sin. Some people claim to love God, yet they avoid the church completely. John would say that you cannot love God without also loving the children of God (i.e. the church).

In John's world there are only two groups of people: the children of God and the children of the devil. You and I belong to one of these groups. He says, "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother" (3.10). Children of God are those who do right and those who love their brothers. In fact, John says that if you hate your brother, then you are a murderer (3.15). Later he says that if you claim to love God while hating your brother, then you are a liar (4.20-21). Thus, one who claims to be a Christian but does not have love in his heart is both a murderer and a liar, and certainly murderers and liars do not belong to God.

You cannot love God and the world at the same time. John writes, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." This is a strong passage, but it is also a confusing passage to many. The same God who loves the world (see John 3.16) tells us not to love the world. Is there a contradiction here? Not at all. God loves the sinful people of the world and desires to save them. We are told not to love or participate in the values and lifestyle of fallen humanity—what John calls "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (KJV).

You cannot love the Father and the world at the same time because the will of the Father and the values of the world are in opposition to each other. When our life is filled with lust and greed and pride, then there is no room left for God's love. We end up placing our own sinful desires and ambitions before God. And this is such a foolish thing to do because the world and its desires pass away. Hebrews 11.25 speaks of "the fleeting pleasures of sin" (NRSV). There is a certain pleasure in sin, yet it does not last and it

does not ultimately satisfy. Yet, whoever does the will of God lives forever. There is nothing wrong with enjoying earthly blessings that come from God, for God is pleased when we enjoy them to his glory (see 1 Tim 6.17; 1 Cor 10.31). However, the secret is to not allow anything, even earthly blessings that come from God's hand, to capture our hearts and thus to crowd God out of our lives. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither."

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