

How Can I Know?

Lesson 4: The Love Test: Loving the Brethren -- 1 John 2:7-11

There is a reason Jesus said the world would know His disciples not by their arguments, not by their buildings, not even by their doctrine, but by their love for one another. Love is the hardest thing to fake over time. You can fake belief for a while. You can fake religious enthusiasm in a crowd. But love that keeps showing up for difficult people, love that forgives the same person again, love that serves quietly with no applause, that kind of love can only come from a changed heart. It is one thing to say we have been transformed by God. It is another thing entirely to love the way He loves.

John has just given us the obedience test: we know we know God if we keep His commands. Now he draws out the command that stands at the center of them all. He calls it both old and new. Old, because love has been God's command from the beginning. New, because in Jesus it has taken on a fresh and shining form, a love that lays down its life for others. "Whoever loves his brother abides in the light," John writes, "and in him there is no cause for stumbling" (1 John 2:10). And then he says the opposite with startling bluntness: the one who hates his brother is in darkness and does not even know where he is going.

This is uncomfortable, and it is meant to be. John will not let us separate our love for God from our love for the people God has placed around us, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. We would much rather keep our spirituality vertical and private, a matter between us and God, where the people who irritate us cannot complicate things. John says no. The test of whether we are walking in the light is not only how we feel about God in our quiet times. It is how we treat the brother sitting across the aisle, the one who let us down, the one we find hard to love.

For a study on assurance, this is one of John's clearest mirrors. He says that loving the brethren is evidence that we have passed from darkness into light, evidence that the life of God is genuinely in us. Not a perfect, effortless love, but a real and growing one. So this lesson asks us to look honestly at our relationships, not to manufacture guilt, but to discover one of the surest signs that we truly belong to God. Read these verses, and let love do its searching, reassuring work.

Group Discussion: Jesus said the world would recognize His disciples by their love for one another (John 13:35), and John makes that love a test of walking in the light. Why do you think love for fellow believers is such a reliable sign of a genuine relationship with God? Why is it so much harder to fake than other things?

Personal Reflection: John says the one who loves his brother abides in the light. Bring to mind one fellow believer you find genuinely hard to love right now. What is your heart truly like toward that person, and what would walking in the light look like in that relationship?

Read 1 John 2:7-11

Study Questions

1. John calls the command to love both an “old commandment” and “a new commandment” (vv. 7-8). In what sense is the call to love both old and new, and why does John frame it this way?
2. Bring to mind a specific fellow believer you find difficult to love. What is the real condition of your heart toward that person, and what is one concrete way you could move toward genuine love rather than mere tolerance this week?
3. John says, “Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling” (v. 10). What is the connection between loving fellow believers and walking in the light, and how does love keep us from stumbling?
4. We can be tempted to keep our faith private and vertical, a matter only between us and God, while keeping difficult people at arm’s length. Where have you been tempted to separate loving God from loving His people, and why is that separation impossible according to John?
5. John warns, “Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (v. 11). What does this teach about what hatred and bitterness do to a person spiritually?

6. Forgiveness is one of love's hardest tests. Is there someone in the family of God you have not truly forgiven? What is holding you back, and what would it cost you to release that grievance into God's hands?
7. John roots our love in something deeper than our own resolve. Drawing on the wider witness of his letter, where does the power to love the brethren actually come from, and why can it not be manufactured by sheer willpower?
8. Love for the brethren shows itself not mainly in feelings but in concrete action. In what specific, practical way is God calling you to actively serve or bless a fellow believer in the days ahead, especially in a way that costs you something?
9. John makes love for fellow believers a test of whether we have truly passed from death to life. How does this love function as evidence of genuine salvation, and how does it guard against an assurance built on belief that bears no fruit in how we treat others?
10. Look back across this lesson on loving the brethren. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses, and the single truth from 1 John 2:7-11 that you most need to carry into the coming week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 13:34–35, the new commandment and the mark of true discipleship; 1 John 3:14–18, passing from death to life shown by love in deed and truth; 1 John 4:19–21, we love because he first loved us, and cannot love God while hating a brother; 1 Corinthians 13:1–7, the patient, enduring shape of genuine love; Ephesians 4:31–32, putting away bitterness and forgiving as God forgave us.