

# Love One Another #1

Notes for 3 May

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## Read: 1 John 3

I try to imagine the world for Christians when John wrote this letter, so I went on a bit of a Google hunt and did a quick summary:

- It is thought that the letters of John were written about AD 90.
- Jerusalem had fallen in AD 70, burned to the ground by the Romans and many Jews had been killed or sold into slavery.
- Jewish Zealots in Masada held out for three years but in AD 73, rather be taken by the Romans, they had committed suicide.
- Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD.
- In AD 80 the Colosseum was completed and used until 404 AD.
- In AD 87 Emperor Domitian demanded that he be worshipped as Lord and God. Christians refused to do this. In AD 89, Domitian began a reign of terror against Christians, with John being exiled to Patmos being part of this.
- Domitian was assassinated in 96 AD. There was relative peace in the Roman empire for a while after this.
- Around AD 90, Gnosticism arose. *The Complete Book of When and Where* states:  
  
*"Gnostics", as they came to be known, taught a form of dualism in which spirit is good and material is evil. As a result, Gnostics denied Jesus' humanity. Their understanding of the material world caused them to become either extreme ascetics in order to avoid corruption by matter or extreme hedonists who thought that what happens in the physical world is irrelevant. Some of the later New Testament books - Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, and 1, 2, and 3 John - combat the earliest forms of Gnosticism.*

1 John 3 discusses our relationship with God (verses 1-3) and how sin breaks down our relationship with God and with our fellow humans (verses 4-9). Hatred for our brother and sister in Christ is also an attack on our relationships with God and with each other (verses 10-15). In the remainder of the chapter John talks about how to love our fellow believers.

## Verses 1-3: Our Relationship with God

John states that we are the children of God and that, although it has not yet been revealed, we shall be like Jesus and that we will see Jesus as he is.

- What does this mean to you?

Verse 3 talks about purifying ourselves just as Jesus is pure. Given the purity culture that pervades much of Christianity today, and the Gnosticism that existed in John's day:

- What should we make of this statement by John?

#### **Verses 4-9: Sin breaks down relationships**

John talks about sin and lawlessness and righteousness. There are no grey areas here. Sin and lawlessness are of the devil and righteousness is of God. Jesus has come to destroy sin.

In verse 9 John says that those who have been born of God will not continue to sin because God's seed lives in them. This has not really been my experience, at least I don't see myself as being without sin. Is this talking about sinlessness or might this verse be addressing something else?

- Discuss

#### **Verses 10-15: warning against hatred towards others**

In verse 10 John says that we can know the difference between the children of God and those who are not by their actions, whether they do what is right and/or love their fellow believers/human beings. I find that people tend to have different views on what is right and wrong. On the other hand, hating our fellow believers and/or fellow human beings seems to me to be more concrete. Here again John presents a simple dichotomy to get his message across, love and life versus hatred and death/murder. Those who love are of God, and eternal life, and those who hate their brother/sister are still in death, a murderer, and don't have eternal life.

- Do you think it's that simple?
- What has been your experience with hatred in the church and/or outside the church?

#### **Verses 16-24: Love our fellow believers**

In verse 16, John says Jesus showed us what love is by laying down his life for us. John uses the example of showing love by giving to those in need to reiterate that as Christians we need to love each other. He then goes on to link the idea of being in the truth with helping others (verse 18-19).

- Why does John include *truth* here, ie in action and in truth (verse 18)?
- How does this compare with what we have often been taught about 'truth'?

John is linking a lot of different concepts together in the remainder of this chapter. Verses 20 and 21 talk about feelings of guilt or our hearts condemning us. John says that God knows about it anyway. He introduces the concept that if we keep God's commandments, we can be bold before God, assured that we will receive what we ask for. However, John says that by believing in Jesus and loving one another (ie love God and love our fellow humans), we are keeping God's commandments.

- Is this what we have traditionally thought of as keeping God's commands?

Finally, in verses 23 and 24, John seems to say that the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as proof that we are keeping God's commands, ie loving one another is proof of the Spirit dwelling in us.

- Discuss