

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW

# 1 JOHN 3:11-4:21

1 JOHN

## TABLE TALK

- ▶ Introduce yourselves around the table
- ▶ What lingering questions or observations do you have from the study thus far?
- ▶ Read John 3:11-24 as a group. What stands out to you? How does it illuminate what we have studied thus far?

1 JOHN

## 3:11-13

- ▶ A turning point in the text - from this point on, the emphasis is on love within the community rather than hostility from without
- ▶ The mention of those who fail to love brother or sister (3:10) recalls Jesus' command of John 13:34 - this is "the message you have heard from the beginning" (the message from Jesus)
- ▶ An OT example: Cain and Abel (v. 12; Genesis 4:1-16) - the opposite of love for one's brother is jealousy leading to hatred leading to murder - ref. John 8:37-44 where Jesus accuses adversaries of being murderers.
- ▶ The world hates the beloved disciples because of that same jealousy-righteous vs. evil (v. 13)

### 3:14-16

- ▶ v. 14 - Hatred = death, love = life - hatred belongs to the realm of darkness (2:9)
- ▶ v. 15 - All who hate a brother or sister are "murderers" - Matt. 5:21-26 - perhaps not literal, but working for the realm of death and darkness. By contrast, all who love are life-givers. The narrative of Cain leads to hatred and death; that of Jesus to love and life.
- ▶ v. 16 - The definition of love is embodied in Jesus, who laid down his life for us—thus we must lay down our lives for one another (rather than destroying life through hatred)

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### 3:17-18

- ▶ Specific examples of love
- ▶ v. 17 - Does God's love abide in those who have plenty but are unwilling to help? (No)
- ▶ v. 18 - Little children (Johannine address) - love not in word or speech but in truth and action (see also James 1:22; 2:16; Matt. 7:16-20)
- ▶ Speech must be undergirded by a willingness to act in love toward a fellow believer

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### 3:19-20

- ▶ "By this" (by loving in truth and action - v. 18) believers know they are from the truth and have reassurance when they experience self-doubt or feel self-condemned, or when they are criticized by others
- ▶ That God knows our hearts and our deeds overrides any concerns about self-doubt or the opinions of others
- ▶ Loving in truth and action doesn't automatically lead to popularity; it can lead to jealousy and hatred by others. John reassures us that doing the right thing is always the right thing regardless of the response.
- ▶ Always take the high road—there's a lot less traffic!

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### 3:21-22

- ▶ If our hearts do not condemn us, if we do not suffer from the burden of guilt, we have "boldness before God"
- ▶ We receive whatever we ask because we obey his commandments
- ▶ A caution about transactional theology: Whatever we ask will match the will of God - not a blank check necessarily, but about the quality of our asking via obedience and love
- ▶ See John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23
- ▶ Those who obey God and live in love are acceptable and pleasing to God no matter how they feel

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### 3:23-24

- ▶ Switch from plural "commandments" to singular "commandment" (though there are actually two)
  - ▶ Believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
  - ▶ Love one another, as he commanded us
- ▶ Believing and obeying leads to "abiding" of the believer and Jesus (or God), the result of keeping his commandments (v. 24)
- ▶ The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of the knowledge of this abiding - witness of the Spirit brings assurance

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### TABLE TALK

- ▶ Summarize the teaching of 3:11-24 in your own words
- ▶ Read 4:1-6 together. What do you observe? What questions does this section raise for you?

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### 1 JOHN 4:1-3 - HERESY VS. ORTHODOXY

- ▶ "Testing the spirits" - How does one determine whether it is the Holy Spirit or another spirit speaking?
- ▶ Need to test because of many false prophets
- ▶ Criteria: Christology - Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God
- ▶ Those that do not are "the spirit of the antichrist" - ref. 2 John 7
- ▶ The Spirit of God inspires a valid confession Jesus and by its absence one can recognize the false spirits

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### 4:4-6

- ▶ v. 4 - being "of God" is polar opposite of being "of the world"
- ▶ the one who is in your is greater than the one who is in the world
- ▶ v. 5 - The world listens to those who are from the world
- ▶ v. 6 - But we are "from God" - those who are from God listen to us
- ▶ Spirit of truth vs. spirit of error/falsehood - the person who is willing to lie to achieve a certain spiritual end is, in part, who John has in mind
- ▶ Bottom line: If your theology is popular with the world, there's a pretty good chance it's not from God!

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### CHARLES WESLEY

What e'er the Spirit speaks in me,  
Must with the written Word agree;  
If not I cast it all aside,  
As Satan's voice or nature's pride



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### DISCERNING THE SPIRIT

- ▶ The Spirit does not work in a vacuum independent of church or the Scriptures
- ▶ In questions of doctrine or discipline, claims of spiritual inspiration do not have overriding authority
- ▶ Montanism - "new prophecy," progressive revelation
- ▶ Gnosticism - special knowledge, repudiation of the material
- ▶ Jesus is the test of any claim to possess the Spirit
- ▶ Claims of the Spirit must always be worked out in community, prayer, and in dialogue with the Scriptures - Acts 15:28

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### 4:1-12 - TABLE TALK

- ▶ Read the text as a group
- ▶ What is the main point of this passage?
- ▶ Why is John reiterating points he has made earlier?

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### 4:7

- ▶ More concise theological statement than 1 Corinthians 13 ("love chapter")
- ▶ That love is from God, that God is the author of love, is the basic premise of Christian faith and theology
- ▶ But "love" has a definitive model in God's revelation in Jesus. We must not take this out of context to define love in nebulous, feeling-oriented terms
- ▶ "Love" (meaning love modeled after Jesus, loving one another, obeying his commands) is evidence that one is born of God and knows God

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**4:8-9**

- ▶ By contrast, those who do not love do not know God.
- ▶ "God is love" is not meant to be a catch-all description of God.
- ▶ To say that "God is love" is very different than saying "Love is God." If we define love according to our own terms, we also then create a god in our own image
- ▶ God's love is comprehensive, costly, corrective, definitive, demonstrable
- ▶ God's love is revealed in God sending his Son into the world so that we might "live through him"

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**4:10**

- ▶ God defines the nature of love by giving his Son
- ▶ Not in response to our love for him ("not that we loved God") - but initiated by God
- ▶ Close parallel to John 3:16
- ▶ "Atoning sacrifice for our sins" - the love of God is not abstract, but is based upon the concrete historical deed of Jesus' death and resurrection
- ▶ The love of God is an interpretation of the death of Jesus and the heart of the gospel

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**THE TRUE NATURE OF LOVE**

- ▶ John presupposes human need and sinfulness - we are not "ok" (1:8)
- ▶ The human predicament requires a divine solution - love expressed in God's sacrificial self-giving in Christ
- ▶ Any definition of "love" that does not acknowledge our sin and need is too shallow
- ▶ God's love is redemptive because it is costly, and it is costly because the human predicament is severe

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### 4:11-12

- ▶ The quality of our love for one another must be reflected in the quality of God's love for us, demonstrated in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ
- ▶ "No one has ever seen God" - direct quote of John 1:18 - "It is God the only Son, who is close the Father's heart, who has made him known."
- ▶ How is he known? God lives in us if we love one another - that love becomes "perfected" or "completed" in us.
- ▶ Insofar as we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected. We demonstrate love of God and neighbor more and more
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### A WESLEYAN DISTINCTIVE

- ▶ Wesley's definition of a Methodist: "One who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit given unto him."
- ▶ Perfection = not sinlessness but perfection of intention (love)
- ▶ The more we are filled with the Spirit ("God lives in us"), the more our capacity for love for God and others increases and the more sin's influence decreases.

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### 4:13-16

- ▶ We know we abide in God/Christ because he has given us the Spirit
- ▶ Evidence of abiding: testimony (v. 14) and confession (v. 15)
- ▶ Enables knowledge and belief in God's love (v. 16)
- ▶ God is love—abiding in love leads to mutual abiding with God
- ▶ Reassurance of standing necessary for community after departure of schismatics
- ▶ God is the ultimate ground of the believer's status and confidence

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**4:17-18**

- ▶ John describes how love brings reassurance
- ▶ Love as obedience removes fear of punishment for disobedience
- ▶ Perfect love produces confidence in the day of judgment
- ▶ Perfect love casts out fear—if one fears judgment, then there is still a lack of perfection in love
- ▶ John is seeking to build confidence in the community, that they have God's love and are to live in it

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**4:19**

- ▶ A reiteration of the logic of Christian morality: "We love because he first loved us."
- ▶ Love can be received only as it is shared
- ▶ God's love frees us from self-concern and enables us to truly love others

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**4:20-21**

- ▶ Once again, John attacks his critics, the schismatics
- ▶ If you can't love those whom you see, you cannot possibly love God whom you cannot see.
- ▶ God's love and our love for one another cannot be separated.

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**QUESTIONS?**

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