1 John 3:11-17 Commentary
New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(1 John 3:11) For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

The Old and New Testaments include commands to love God and others (see Leviticus 19:18; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 6:5; Deuteronomy 7:9; Deuteronomy 10:19, and Matthew 5:43-44, Mark 12:30-31, and Luke 6:27). From the very beginning of John's teaching, he taught that the followers of Jesus should love others, especially those in the family of God. Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate love for one's neighbors, even those

we do not know but those we know who are needy (see Luke 10:25-37). He commanded us to love our enemies and others as we love ourselves. Love includes doing what we wisely can to promote the happiness and well-being of other people, including fellow believers, friends, and enemies. We will truly feel the happiest when doing all we wisely can for our friends and those who follow Jesus Christ as we do. Perhaps in most instances, all we can wisely do for our enemies is pray for them. Obeying the Great Commission of Jesus is an example of love for others (see Matthew 28:18-20). [Note to teachers: You may want to assign the above Scripture readings to members of your class to read aloud.]

When John wrote of "we," he wrote of and to Christians, the followers of Jesus Christ. Christians are members of the family of God. Christians have been adopted into God's family by grace through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In Ephesians 1:5, Paul explained, "He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will." The Son of God becomes the Elder brother of all who believe in and trust in Him, and they become brothers and sisters in Christ who should love everyone in the family of God—"one another." In Hebrews 2:11, we read: "For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."

(1 John 3:12) We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

True believers in Jesus Christ will not practice sin or live like those who are from the evil one, the devil. In John 8:44, Jesus said the devil was the father of evil people: "You are from *your father the devil*, and *you choose to do your father's desires*. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Both Adam and Eve would have taught and warned both Cain and Abel about how the devil in the form of a serpent had deceived Eve and how Adam was not deceived but also sinned when they both disobeyed God (see Genesis 3:1-21). Both of their sons would have learned how to obey God and avoid doing what the devil wanted, but Cain chose to disobey God. Though Cain was physically the son of Adam and Eve, spiritually Cain chose to become a son of the devil. Cain chose to do the devil's desires, and the devil became his spiritual father. The details of Cain's murder of his brother Abel can be found in Genesis 4:1-15. John explained that "Cain's own deeds" (note the plural form "deeds"); that is, "Cain's ways of living" were evil. He did so many evil deeds that doing evil became a habit for him, and he became like the devil. Cain became a slave of sin. In John 8:34, Jesus taught, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin." Cain turned away from

God to selfishness and self-centeredness. He determined to do all things his way, which was the devil's way of doing. Whenever he did "good," it was only because he would benefit personally from what he did, and that was selfish, self-centered, and sinful. Offering the LORD an offering from "the fruit of the ground" instead of offering "the firstlings of his flock" was not his first or only sin, but an example of how Cain insisted on doing things his way according to the devil's desires instead of God's way. John wrote that Cain's *"own deeds were evil*" and the deeds of Abel were *righteous*. Abel habitually obeyed God and showed that God was his spiritual Father. As followers of Jesus, in 1 John 3:7-8, the New American Standard Bible puts the meaning well for us: "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the *one who practices righteousness* is righteous, just as He is righteous; the *one who practices sin* is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." No one can honestly live as a follower of Jesus Christ without practicing righteousness. Doing right is a habit for the followers of Jesus Christ and doing wrong is the exception to the way of life they habitually practice. Christians know they will not live perfectly in this world until they see Jesus face-to-face, but they also know that with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Bible's teachings that they will mature spiritually. Even in this world, they will become more like their spiritual Father and His Son. Cain probably became jealous and angry with his brother Abel. His brother's

righteousness offended him for his deeds were evil. He came to hate Abel; therefore, he murdered his brother. John warned those in the church not to do evil deeds and adopt evil ways of living like Cain did. Indeed, the Bible warns everyone to never adopt an evil unrighteousness way of life for by doing so you will become evil like the devil, a slave of sin, and if you do not repent and turn to Jesus Christ to save you, you will do horrible deeds beyond your current imagining.

(1 John 3:13) Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you.

Though Jesus won the victory over the devil by His sinless life, death, and resurrection, the devil still has power in the world and Christians must resist the devil and his temptations. The followers of Jesus Christ have power over the devil when they do as James 4:7, tells them: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The devil will run away from Christians when they submit themselves to God (to do God's will) and when they resist the devil (refuse to do the devil's will). Remember what Jesus revealed in John 16:11, "The ruler of this world has been condemned," so the devil will flee from those committed to do the will of God. In this verse and other places in the Bible, "the world" and "this world" do not mean "God's creation," but the spiritual resistance movement inspired by the devil against God and God's family. "The world" murdered Jesus, so God's family should not be surprised when those of "the world" hate

them and want to kill them too. “The world” hates the righteous way of living demonstrated by true Christians, just as Cain hated the righteous way of living demonstrated by Abel. It is vitally important for young people growing up to understand that there is nothing wrong with them when some of “the world” bully, hate, and persecute them. They suffer persecution because they live rightly as Jesus leads them, and the world takes offense at their way of life. Remind the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:10-12, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” And when Christians suffer persecution, Jesus has told them how to respond in Matthew 5:43-45, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” God our Father does what He wisely can for everyone, and the wisest thing God did for the world was send His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save the world and “to destroy the works of the devil” (see John 3:16-18 and 1 John 3:8). Those of the world feel threatened by the children of God because they do not want them to destroy

the devil's works and interfere with their desires. The devil will also do what it can to move the worldly to do what it desires—hate Christians.

(1 John 3:14) We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.

We might ask, "Who loves those in God's family?" And we might answer, "Those who have passed from death to life; those who have entered God's family through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ—they will love those in God's family." They will seek to promote the true happiness and well-being of others in God's family. If someone has not passed from spiritual death to spiritual life, they cannot and they will not love others, they will not love the followers of Jesus, they will not love the Father or the Son, but they will remain in a state of opposition to God, to God's ways, and to God's people as "nice" as they might appear to be—especially as they appear to those of the world. Those of this world will often love and honor those who abide in death, for they give those who also remain in death what they desire. Increasingly, by what they say and do, those who abide in death become more obvious to the followers of Jesus.

(1 John 3:15) All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.

To hate anyone, especially anyone in God's family, is disobedient, unloving, and unwise. Love for others does not mean accepting their unrighteous behavior as right, approving of their sins as though living a life of sin is unimportant, or disregarding lifestyles that contradict the commands of God and the teachings of the Bible. If we love someone who is practicing sin and disobeying God, we will grieve for them, pray for them, and we will do what we wisely can to help them as we see them continuing to turn from God to "the world" and to a different father, "the devil." Remember: sometimes the only "best and wisest" action possible is to pray for them and perhaps ask the Lord Jesus to discipline them and lead them to repentance and faith in Him. John writes of "haters" as "murderers" because to kill someone spiritually by hating them and leading them away from the will of God as revealed in the Bible is spiritual murder and an expression of hatred for God and those in God's family. When we see this happen, we need to pray for the victims and seek some way to help them return to or remain in the Light of God. We can pray for the Lord Jesus to show us what we can wisely do to help them. Jesus said, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council;

and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:20-22). "Eternal life" and Jesus who is "The Life" will not abide, live in, or remain in those who commit spiritual murder or physical murder. To receive eternal life and abide in Christ, those who have committed spiritual or physical murder must repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They may also need to make amends for the evil they have done if they wisely can and do so without hurting others needlessly. If we want to remain certain that "Eternal Life" is in us and remains in us, we will not hate, but we will love everyone in God's family and our enemies as Jesus did. We may never want to be near someone again, but we can pray that God will do what is best for them.

(1 John 3:16) We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Because Jesus loved those He came to save from sin and death, Jesus taught the truth despite opposition from "the world," which included the devil and most of the religious and political leaders who met Jesus or heard about Jesus. Despite all opposition, Jesus preached repentance and faith in himself as the Messiah and the Lord over all creation. He chose to lay down His life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We cannot atone for the sins of others, but we can follow the example of Jesus, sacrificially love others, give our lives to help others, and pray and help others find Jesus and His way.

(1 John 3:17) How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

John wrote his letter to Christians, to the Family of God, to the Church, to those who followed Jesus and who wanted to follow Jesus more closely. Remembering Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan and remembering the Bible's teachings about working and not being lazy, members of God's family will want to help others in God's family when they have the means to do what they wisely can to help them. It is wise, as John wrote, to help a brother or sister truly in need if we have the world's goods to help them. If we do not have the ability or means to help them, perhaps we can find some other way to help them or help them find ways to help themselves. When a believer in Jesus has the means, perhaps only the means to help someone find work, refusing to help someone in need in God's family may be a sign of a lack of love and an indication that the love of God is not within them.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. From the beginning, what lesson did John teach the followers of Jesus? Does this lesson still apply to Christians today?

2. What two reasons did John give for Cain murdering his brother Abel? Can you think of one or more additional possible reasons or motivations?

3. What distinguished Abel from his brother Cain?

4. From these verses, how can a follower of Jesus Christ know that they have passed from death to life and have eternal life?

5. How did Jesus demonstrate His love and teach us what loves does?

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