

Session 2

September 12, 2021

SURE OF A RELATIONSHIP

1 John 2:3-11,15-17

In most religions, there is no concept of a personal and vital relationship with God. Yet rather than portraying God as a harsh dictator demanding submission, or a pantheon of spirits that requires appeasing, or a great “force” from which we all come and will all ultimately go, the Bible teaches that Almighty God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, is knowable, approachable, loves us as a father loves a child, and actually desires a relationship with us. While this truth is astounding to those outside the faith, it is a great source of encouragement to those of us who follow Him.

Our relationship with God is demonstrated by our obedience (vv. 3-6). There are a lot of reasons to obey God. Animistic religions teach that obedience is necessary to keep away evil spirits. Hinduism teaches that obedience to that which is right assures *positive karma*, needed for advancement in the spiritual journey. Islam suggests that God relishes the idea of punishing sinners, so obedience is motivated by fear. Verse 3 is a direct reflection of the words of Jesus in John 14:5, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Hence obedience to God’s commands, according to the Bible, is rooted in the love we have for Him. Two important points are made. First, those who truly love Him in the purest of ways demonstrate that love by pleasing Him with their obedience (v. 5). Second, those who claim to be in true relationship with Him will intentionally imitate Him (v. 6). In general, that means to act in all ways as He acted. But in this context, we cannot neglect imitating the way that He loved. This too, is stated by Jesus in the Gospel of John: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: *just as I have loved you*, you also are to love one another.” (John 13:34). In this case, even the loving is done in obedience. For reflection: *How does our relationship with God differ from other relationships we have? Can God be treated as a business partner? Colleague? Friend?*

Our relationship with God is demonstrated by our love (vv. 7-11). Not only does our obedience in loving God demonstrate that we have a relationship with Him, but our love for one another does as well. Verses 7 and 8 seem almost contradictory. The command to love one another has always been a part of God’s charge to His people (for example, see Prov. 17:17; Is. 1:17; Zech. 7:9 et al.). Since God is love (1 John 4:8), this is nothing new. Yet there is a new emphasis to loving one another in the New Testament, made obvious in the *true light* of Christ’s teachings (the gospel) and His sacrificial death on our behalf. Not only does our love for one another demonstrate our relationship to God (see John 13:35), but failure to demonstrate that love is an absolute indicator that one has *no* relationship with Christ. Five times the word *darkness* appears in these verses; twice, it is related to *hating one’s brother*. The resulting consequences? *Darkness causes one to stumble* (v. 10), *lostness* (v. 11), and *blindness* (v. 11). For reflection: *What do these verses say about the capability of believers to hate? Are there things or people that we do need to hate? Why?*

Our relationship with God is demonstrated by our allegiance (vv. 15-17). The final indication in our text that we have a relationship with God is found in the believer’s disregard for the world. These verses do not refer to the physical world we live in, but rather the term (*cosmos*)

refers to the unregenerate philosophical system that governs it. The world is worldly rather than spiritual. As such, it is filled with selfish lust and unbridled arrogance (v. 16) that stand counter to the self-control and humility God desires. As a result, God utterly detests the world and all that it stands for. His warning to separate oneself from the corruption of this world is a reminder that all of it—the world, and its lust, and its pride—are all temporary and passing away, while those who are committed to God will continue forever with Him (v. 17) For reflection: *How does our allegiance to God and disdain for the world show up in everyday life? Is this a conscious decision or does it come naturally?*