

Love One Another 1 John 3:11-18

Introduction: Confusion about Love

Love. Millions seek it. Kids dream of it. Artists depict it. Movie buffs crave it. Preachers preach it. Singers sing it. But what is it?

While every generation has its popular love ballads (older ones: Ray Charles, "I can't stop loving you," 1962; Beatles, "All you need is love" 1967; "Endless Love" Diana Ross/Lionel Richie, 1981). I remember that the 80's had numerous ones (and a lot of people with really bad hair. It's a miracle anyone was saved in the 80's).

- In 1984, **Foreigner**: "I Want to Know What Love Is."
- **Tina Turner** rocked "What's Love Got to Do with It?"
- **Stevie Wonder** "I Just Called to Say I Love You."
- In 1985, **Whitney Houston**: "Saving All My Love for You."
- **Kool and the Gang** reminded everyone, "love will stand the test of time" with a hit song "Cherish."
- **Whitesnake**: "Is This Love?" in 1987.
- That same year, **LL Cool J**, "I Need Love."

In this passage, we see the nature and the necessity of Christian love. We get an answer to Foreigner's question. **It's kind of like a Johnny Cash song – "Love, God, Murder"**

Big Picture of 1 John

Part of John's purpose for writing is to provide assurance to his readers that they are children of God. He's answering the question,

- "How do you know if I'm in the family of God?"
- "How does one know if he or she is truly a son or daughter of God?"

5:13 is somewhat of a purpose statement...

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may **know** that you have eternal life.*

1 John 5:13

"know"- He uses this word some 40 times. He is writing in a day of theological vagueness, like our day. John's opponents were teaching something that was like to the new age movement; very mystical, it had to do with a form of esoteric knowledge that was devoid of practical reality... Sort of like you something you might hear today "affirm the inner light within you, instead of "repent of sin, trust Jesus and follow him." It was mystical, vague...

But John is writing to **provide distinction. He gives a number of contrasts in the letter:**

- **Dark/Light; Children of the Devil/Children of the Father; Truth/Lies; Life/Death; Love/Hate**

John provides **Four tests of genuine faith – 4 avenues of assurance**

- **Truth Test**: Jesus is God and Savior. He's come in the flesh and he is the Christ. He

- died as our substitute. (see 4:2, 5:1)
- **Righteousness Test**: Practicing Righteousness (see 2:29)
- **Relational Test**: loving one another (3:23; 4:7-12; 5:1). **3:10** puts these two and three together.
- **Spiritual/Experiential Test** (3:24)
- This is important because it's possible to be a Christian and have doubts.
- It's also possible to profess to be a Christian but to have a false assurance.
- IT's this relational dynamic that we're looking at today....
- If you're a real Christian, you love God's people. John puts the matter clearly.
- Have you fallen in love with God's people?
- This is something we should always grow in as a Christian... "do this more and more" (1 Thess 4:9-10).
- **Personal story**. What can I offload to spend more time with our people?

6 Truths on Brotherly Love

#1: Brotherly love should mark Christ's people (3:11)

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

- "the message we heard from the beginning." (10X in John's letters, see 2:7. Be afraid if someone has new stuff).
- This refers to the time when the readers first heard the message. This would have included the apostolic Gospel and the command of Jesus "to love one another." See 3:23.
- **While methods may change from time to time, the heart of Christianity is unchanging.**
- "love one another" – "This is the first of six references in the Letters of John to Jesus' command that his disciples should love one another (see 1 John 3:23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5). They are probably dependent on the account of the Last Supper discourses found in the Fourth Gospel (John 13:34; 15:12, 17).⁷
- Jesus commanded it and demonstrated it (see John 13)
- **The Commandment Again in John 15:12, 17**
 - This is the only commandment that begins this way
 - He has issued many – 1,400 commands in the NT, but this one is "my commandment"
 - His commandment is just as important as those that God wrote with his finger.

Questions

- How seriously have you taken this command of Jesus Christ? Do you take it as seriously as the command, “Do not commit adultery?”
- Do you think you can habitually break it?
- Is this issue on your mind when you gather for worship? Do you view the church as a people for whose well being you are personally responsible? Can you say "I am my brother's keeper?"
- Is your conversation about other believers indicative of keeping this commandment?

See how important it is! Elevate your view of "love one another."

#2: Brotherly love is difficult because of the evil one (3:12)

¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

- John goes to the early chapters of Genesis to describe what we should avoid and pursue when it comes to love. He tells us why it's difficult. The evil is at work. Sin has affected our relationship not only with God, but also with people.
- The word “murder” is the word for “butcher” or “slaughter”
- The devil is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44)
- **From Cain, we learn what we must avoid: Jealously (12). The first man to die in Scripture was killed by his brother. You are to be your brother's keeper, not killer. Don't be like Cain. Cain is an example of a child of the evil one, with no spiritual life.**
- What was Cain's problem? **Wicked jealousy**. Cain was jealous of his brother's righteousness. His brother's offering was accepted while his wasn't, and it turned to hate, which turned to murder.
- Stott: “Jealousy-hatred murder is a natural and terrible sequence.” (see James 4:1-2)
- “Sin is crouching at your door” (Gen 4:7) – conflict exists in this fallen world, and we need the power of the Spirit for harmony to reign.

#3: Brotherly love attracts some people but angers others (3:13)

¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

- With the example of Cain and Abel, John points out a pattern that has existed throughout the ages.
- Some are attracted to Christians' love for one another – Acts 2:42-47; Jn 13:34-35, “**Final Apologetic**”
- Others are repelled by it, and even grow hostile in reaction to it.
- **In John 15, John puts these two together: love for one another and hatred of the world. He says, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20).**
- **Jesus, like Abel was killed, though he was righteous. His innocent blood was shed.**

Jesus blood speaks a better word (Heb 12:24), of **forgiveness** and atonement, not **vengeance**.

- **Don't be surprised** by the world's hatred of you living out your faith (cf., 2 Tim 3:12)
- Some professions are inherently dangerous. **Soldiers** will get shot at occasionally. They are not surprised by it. In a war, they don't say, "I can't believe they are shooting at me." **Racecar** drivers shouldn't be surprised when they encounter accidents. **Baseball** players will get hit with the baseball. But there's no crying in baseball! Baristas, shouldn't be surprised when people order coffee. And Christians shouldn't be surprised when the world hates us. They hated Jesus too.
- If you want to be liked by everyone, Christianity isn't for you.
- If you want to be considered "cool" and popular, then Christianity isn't for you. But if you want to have life, then look nowhere else. Better to be spiritually alive than cool and dead. That leads to the next point....

#4: Brotherly love is a sign of genuine conversion (3:14-15)

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

- "Brother" occurs 15 times in the letter, to speak of the family of God.
- Faith and love are tied together in the NT (see Gal 5:6)
- This idea surrounds these verses – see 3:10; 4:7-12
- We need something more than Jesus' example. We need new life.
- We can't follow Jesus and avoid Cain, apart from the new birth. Christ's death, resurrection, and Spirit enables us to love.
- Jesus' love melts us. "We love because he first loved us." (4:19)
- His commandments are not burdensome when his spirit is in you (1John 5:3).
- When you become a Christian, you get a new identity and a new family.
- **Illustration: Joshua, "Papa, are all these people our family?"**
- *See what kind of love the father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (3:1). So we are. "We" are.*
- Love for one another is the evidence, not the basis (John 5:24-25) See also 1 John 5:12
- **Verse 15** – He is not necessarily denying the possibility of repentance and forgiveness for a murderer (Paul persecuted Christians, Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers), but *he is talking about a present and abiding state of malicious hate and spirit of murder in the heart of a person, which shows that they are unregenerate. Do you have hate in your heart?*
- A Christian is someone with a new heart and a **new family, and a new commandment** (to love as Jesus has loved). Building on this, notice...
- Physically, we go from life to death, but the gospel is that we get to go from death to life!
- If you're not a Christian, what Jesus holds out to you is not religion, but life.

#5: Brotherly love is cross-centered (3:16)

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

The cross shows us what love is

- Cain's self-centered hatred led to murder; Jesus' selfless love led to sacrifice.
- Popular misunderstandings of love:
 - Love isn't tolerance (not the way people describe tolerance; it does involve tolerance in the biblical sense)
 - Love isn't lust
 - Love isn't "everything"
 - Love isn't sentimentalism
- Christian love involves a passion that leads to action.
- Jesus' love was demonstrated. (Rom 5:8)
- For the Christian, we don't have to guess at what love is. It's not mystical, philosophical, not just "being nice" whatever that means. It's about the cross of Jesus.
- If you aren't making sacrifices for the brothers and sisters in the church then you aren't loving in a distinctly Christian way.
- Throughout the NT the cross is the picture of infinite love:
- Husbands love your wives – not like a donut, sexually, some sentimentalism – like Christ loved... gave himself..
- Eph. 4:32 – forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you... 5:2, walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us

The cross empowers love

- His death was an **atonement death**.
- We don't know real love apart from Christ and the cross.
- **Consider John, Peter, Paul, and others. These were not nice little guys. Yet, they would write about love. They would have hospitals named after them! Jesus changed them.**

#6: Brotherly love involves practical generosity (3:17-18)

17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John gets really down-to-earth here. He says love won't always include martyrdom; but it should always include making the most of every opportunity you have to love people.

Notice the scenario...

- **He has possessions (17a)**

- **He knows the need (17b)**
 - “sees” not a casual passing glance, but careful look of observation. To see and understand the need.
 - This implies that the need is knowable ... sometimes we just don’t know. ... You guys okay, “your wife looks really skinny. No, we are fasting – all year.”
- **“Brother”** is a shift from plural in verse 16.
 - You say you love. Who are you loving? Give me a name, a face, a person.
 - Linus, Peanuts: “I love mankind, It’s humanity I can’t stand”
- **Yet, He does nothing (17c)**
 - A literal rendering, “he closes his heart/affections”
 - “conscious indifference”
 - James 2
 - He doesn’t care, he doesn’t want to be inconvenienced, and he is faced with this question...
- **Question: How does God’s love abide in him? (17d)**
 - Contra Acts 4:32ff
 - It doesn’t
 - You might be able to give a good speech about love – 1 Cor. 13:1-3

Summary: Love in deed and sincerity (18)

He has the heart of a shepherd, “little children” but the voice of a prophet

- **“Let us not love in word or talk”** Love is not just making a good speech.
- He’s not saying don’t be kind or affirming; he’s saying they are worthless if they are not coupled with sincerity and action.
- **“But in Deed (ergo) and Truth”**
 - Passion and action. You are sincere and you demonstrate your love.
 - Can we all agree that “Talk is cheap.”
 - Execution shows love. Faith works. Love works.
 - Let’s drill down on this point:
 - If I say I love baseball, but never watch games, but spend all my time watching soccer, then do I really love baseball?
 - If you say you love your wife, but never spend anytime with her, but spend all your time fishing, then John would question your love. Do you love her or bass?
 - If you say you love your wife, but salivate over pornography, John would say, “Don’t kid yourself.”

We could say the same about the church:

- If you say your love the church, but never show up for gatherings, or serve, or invest, you’re kidding yourself.
- If you say you love the church, but never give – then you have some evaluation to do.

- If you can pay an Iphone bill, but not give an offering to the bride of Jesus Christ, then it doesn't matter what you say – it doesn't how great your ecclesiology papers are, or how many podcasts you listen to, or how many blogs you read – you're words and actions do not correspond. In the words of James, "Don't deceive yourself." Don't be double-minded.
- If this is you, and you say you want to serve in a church as a pastor, just know I wouldn't recommend you. If you don't love the church now, then what makes you think you will love the church once they give you a paycheck?
- **Don't love in word or talk alone. Love in deed and truth.**

Take daily opportunities to serve because you love people.

Take the small opportunities to express love to people.

Most of us will not die martyrdom. Some will. And we should rightly admire them. But most of us are on an installment plan. We will give our lives away, little by little, over the long haul, doing small things. And in some ways, that's more difficult.

Some of you will lay down your life in martyrdom (Peter); others will live long (John) - Will you love people by the Spirit whether it is in Botswana or Bunn, whether you live to be 100 or 29?

2 Questions:

- **What evidence will you give that you heard this sermon?**
- **Do you possess the Spirit that Enables Brotherly love?**
- **"He that has the son has life..."**
- **His commands are not burdensome – they are for our good....**