

Love: More Than Just a Word

(1 John 3:10–3:18)

What is True & What to Do:

A real relationship with God as a Christ-follower should exhibit certain characteristics, such as doing what is right and exhibiting selfless love for one another, not only in speech but in deed and truth.

Background:

The first-century Gnostics, with their secret rituals and promise of new knowledge, not only had a way of making their sinful conduct seem okay, but they confused the early Christians regarding who was truly God's child. John does not want you confused!

Last week, we looked at the first indicator of spiritual re-birth: "doing what is right" (righteousness) in 1 Jn. 3:4–9. John sounded a somber warning: "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God." Such a person is of the devil! Let no man deceive you! John gives this warning to all who have not been born again. The spiritually dead (lost people) are to turn from all forms of sin and seek the Savior.¹ Today, we will look at the second test of spiritual re-birth: "loving one another" in deed and truth.

1.) Love for other believers evidences the fact that Christians have passed out of spiritual death into spiritual life (v. 10-15)

- God's children are to act like children of God. It is not enough to believe rightly. We should behave rightly. Your practice declares who and what you are. Who's your family? God or Satan?
- "Message" is another word for the gospel, which includes the specific command to love. We have heard it from the beginning.
- Cain's murder of Abel (Gen. 4:1–16) illustrates the distinction between love and hate. Hatred and a selfish attitude of jealousy are the opposite of love.

- It is the nature of the wicked to hate the righteous. Notice the shift from "children" to "brothers" in v.14. Whose family are you in?

Evidence: Cain failed the test of love for his brother.

- Where did Cain come from? Answer: "The evil one."
 - What did Cain do? Answer: "He murdered his brother."
 - Why did Cain do it? Answer: "His own deeds were evil."
- John's conclusion: STOP being surprised that the world (people like Cain) hates you! Christians are hated for the same reason.

Few men faced the evil of Nazi Germany and lived to write about it as Martin Niemöller did. On the world's hatred of Christians, he wrote thoughtfully (knowing those of the Devil hate God's children):

The fellowship of Jesus has no promise that it will ever be in the majority; we must indeed guard against thinking that there can ever be any kind of human security or assurance against the world's hatred. All parleys, all truces, all peace treaties are unreal, for the world must hate the Christian fellowship; and because of the fellowship, so long as it is a Christian fellowship, cannot hate, it must suffer at the hands of the world.... The motto of the community of Jesus is: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." It is indeed a conquered world which seeks to terrify us; it is a condemned and dying hatred which attacks us.²

- We have come to know through experience that we have permanently passed from spiritual death (unsaved) to a new spiritual life (saved) because of our love for fellow believers. We know we are saved because we habitually practice love for our fellow believers. Whoever does not love continues to remain in a state of being unsaved, according to John.³
- NOTE: The emphatic use of the word "We" in the original language creates a strong contrast between Christians and non-believers in v.14. There is no contrast if we were to read this text to mean that Christians should love only their own people like the world does. "He who does not love" is not limited to brothers only. Christ loved us while we were sinners (Ro. 5:8). Our love should include everybody, *whether a Christian or not*, just as God's love includes everybody.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 90.

² Martin Niemöller, *The Gestapo Defied: Being the Last Twenty-Eight Sermons*, 2nd ed. (London: William Hodge and Company, 1942) and *Dachau Sermons*, trans. Robert Pfeiffer (London: Latimer House, 1947).

³ David L. Allen, *1–3 John: Fellowship in God's Family*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 153.

- To “pass from death to life” (v. 14) is to experience the irreversible change that occurs when an unbeliever is saved. The wording “He who does not love *abides*” or “*remains* in death” (v.14) indicates that men and women are spiritually dead in their sin to start with and not that they die later through sinning. In John 3:18, the apostle explicitly says those who do not believe stand condemned already. Faith in Jesus delivers you from that condemnation and judgment.
- How is it that one who hates is a murderer? See Mt. 5:21–22. It is not just about what you did but also what you wanted to do.
- Oftentimes what makes an act good or bad, sinful or not sinful, is not the act itself, nor its consequences, but its motive.⁴

2.) Christ’s love is our standard; real love is shown as well as spoken (16–18).

- Everybody knows John 3:16. But do you know 1 John 3:16? Like John 3:16, 1 John 3:16 talks about the love of Christ for us as evidenced in his death on the cross. The former is a *display* of love. The latter is an *explanation* of love.⁵ We know His love for us because we have received it through the Gospel. Most people consider the first law of life to be self-preservation. Jesus teaches us that the first law of spiritual life is self-sacrifice.
- If you want to see or show love to others, look at Jesus on the cross! Because of Christ’s love and death for us, believers should have a “gospel attitude” in that they have an obligation to love others like Christ—not excluding physical death if needed. Jesus, in John 15:13, said, “No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends.”
- What he *is not* saying in v. 16 is that eternal life is earned by loving others, but rather that loving others is evidence that we already have eternal life. It, therefore, becomes another avenue of assurance of eternal life.
- In v. 17, John is not talking about the wealthy or rich person with many things. Instead, he speaks of people who have the basics of livelihood at their disposal to help other people in need. One sin that is often committed is indifference.

- Showing love involves service, which includes more than cheap talk. Can you give me something to eat? Can you share an extra pair of shoes? Can you help with my electric bill? Would it be possible to help me watch my kids? Help does not mean you have to die for me (although it might come to that someday).
- You see your brother’s need and “close your heart” (lit. “entrails,” i.e., feelings). How, then, “can God’s love reside in” you? The obvious and undeniable answer is, “It doesn’t.” It is not there. John knows that our hearts control our hands.⁵
- The brother of Jesus, James, has the same concern as he writes in James 2:15–17:

If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith, if it doesn’t have works, is.

Dead faith. Dead love. Neither one does any good to others.⁵

- John concludes his argument: love expresses itself in good deeds and in truth. Love is not based on empty words. Though you promise someone the world, you may have no intention of following through. “Let me know if you need anything.... uh, I’m busy today.” Or perhaps you do something, but your motive is impure. Manipulation is not being loving but instead exhibiting selfishness. God cares about your motives, intentions, and actions.

APPLICATION:

- ✓ Living the Gospel means having an open heart, eyes, ears, and hands for the hurting, weak, and downtrodden (1 Thess. 5:14). Avoid all temptations to indifference, laziness, lip service, or selfishness.
- ✓ Hatred characterizes Cain, who is of the devil. God’s children need to act like it and avoid hypocrisy. Love characterizes God’s people. Is this you? Does love mark you as a true Christ-follower? Does it originate in self-sacrifice? Does your talk match your walk? Jesus showed us love, and more so should we show others.
- ✓ Love sees beyond what it does not like in a person!

⁴ O. Hallesby, *Why I Am a Christian*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1930), p. 123.

⁵ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1,2,3 John*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 1 Jn 3:16.