

Love & Light

Love One Another

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: 1 John 3:11-24

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

February 11, 2024

Have you ever been accused by somebody else of living a life that they see as holier than thou? If you've never heard this phrase before, it means kind of a self-righteousness or the belief that you are morally superior than those that are around you. Unfortunately, I believe that this phrase is most often used in a derogatory way more than an accurate one. Most of the time I hear this phrase used.

It's because someone feels guilty about what they are doing instead of the other person trying to seem or show themselves as more righteous. Let me just give you a quick example. Let's just say that you have made the decision to not watch R-rated movies. You just said, "You know what? There's just probably nothing good there. I don't need to watch them. So I'm just going to draw the line there. That's where I feel comfortable." And so you're at a friend's house, and they decide they want to watch a movie, and you say, "Cool, that sounds fine." And they pull out a movie.

It's rated R, and they want to watch it. And you say in the nicest way possible, "Hey, that's cool, guys. You have fun. I'm going to go grab a bite to eat. Why don't you give me a call when you're done and I'll just come back and we can hang out?" You say it in the nicest way possible, but as soon as it leaves your mouth, your friends begin hitting you up with, "What? Are you too good? Are you better than us? Oh, yeah, I forgot.

You're holier than thou." You see, their response has nothing to do with any judgment by you or because you did anything or said anything to try to make yourself feel more righteous. It's not because you think you're better than them. Instead, it was that your decision made your friends feel uncomfortable or wrong for what they wanted to do. Now, if your friends claim to be believers and they say this, that hurts even more.

Because instead, they should be encouraging you. They should say, "Hey, that's awesome. I'm glad you've made that stance." And maybe they would be even encouraged to do the same thing. But if your friends are unbelievers, you should almost take it as a compliment. If an unbelieving friend or someone in your life makes fun of you because of a stance you're taking or whatever else, you should take that as a compliment because you and I are to be different. We're supposed to be different.

It should be hard for an unbeliever to understand why you do the things you do or why you don't do the things that they do. Now, I'm not encouraging you to make them feel guilty. We should not expect unbelievers to act like believers. I think this is a trap that we often get caught in as believers, which is why people feel like we judge them sometimes, or they feel guilty, or they don't even want to come to church because we expect them to act like us when they're not going to do that.

And so we shouldn't expect them to act like that. Unfortunately, making them feel guilty, though, happens on its own. This is also not new. This whole idea of people feeling guilty and other people feeling righteous has been happening since the beginning. As we continue in our series today in 1 John, John is going to remind us that you and I should not be surprised if the world hates us. It's going to be a very encouraging message today. The world is going to hate you.

Have a good day, all right? That's what John's going to share with us. Now, he is going to give us some encouraging news, and he's also going to tell us that in spite of the world hating us, we still should love them. We still should be called to love them. We actually are encouraged to love one another, and this love that we have is going to come from the Spirit that God gives to us. John's message to the early church here in his message has been addressing some of the struggles of the early church and things that they were dealing with.

And ironically, there's still things that we deal with today. Some of the issues that he's already addressed have been dealing with false teachers. Now, some of the messaging has changed over the years. During John's time, these false teachers were claiming that Jesus in the flesh was not God because they didn't believe that was possible. He's also been addressing individuals in the church who are claiming to be followers of Jesus but are not acting like it.

By their words out of their mouth, they say, "Yes, we are a part of you. Yes, we believe, but their lifestyle doesn't reflect it." He's been addressing then what the life of a believer should look like, saying that our lives should be defined by light and by love. And he's given a few definitions of that. Now, he wants to make clear as he addresses the church, the followers, giving them how they're supposed to live, he wants to let them know, "You're not going to be perfect.

You're still going to make mistakes, but you're going to be different." Those mistakes, those sins that we make are taken care of by Jesus on the cross, and we can move forward with confidence through the blood of Jesus Christ. But we also should not use Jesus' atoning sacrifice as an excuse to continue to purposefully live in sin. In other words, because I know I'm forgiven, I'll go do whatever I want, and then I will come back and say, "God, please forgive me." John says, "That shouldn't be the case." Instead, your heart will be transformed.

You will be given a new heart. And this transformation is what's going to separate us from how others live. You and I will now be defined by our love, the same love that flowed through Jesus because it's His Spirit that is going to flow through us. And John is going to continue with his message this morning. If you have your Bibles, I encourage you to open up with me to 1 John 3:11. 1 John 3:11.

Last week, we left off in verse 10, and so we're going to wrap up chapter 3. While you're turning there, let me pray and then we'll continue. Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and then allowing Your love to flow through us. Lord, we know that we are called to be different. That's not always easy. In fact, it's very difficult at times. Sometimes we just want to blend in, but we can't.

Your Spirit does not just blend in. It causes us to live differently. And so may we be obedient. May we love you and may we love others well. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. 1 John 3:11, John continues his message by saying, "For this is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another." So John is saying, even though Christ has come and even though we believe that Jesus was the Messiah, He's entered the world, the message and the mission of His followers has not changed.

Our mission, our goal is still to love one another. It doesn't really get any more clear, any more simple, any easier than this. He narrows it down to this sentence, "Love one another." And yet, even knowing how simple this is, we still mess it up quite often. We still make mistakes. Learning to love others is hard. John continues in verse 12. He wants to give us an example.

He says, "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him?" John asks. "Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous." John goes back to the story that many of us have heard of in the Old Testament about Cain and Abel. We have the first family unit, Adam and Eve, they have children, they have Cain and Abel, and we have this first sibling rivalry that takes place.

And we read in the story that Cain killed his brother Abel because of the evil within him. Cain despised his brother Abel, not because of anything that Abel did or because he was trying to live a holier than thou life, but he did not like Abel because of Abel's righteousness. Abel's righteousness made Cain feel uncomfortable.

Therefore, Cain made the decision to eliminate him, hoping that this would allow him to feel better about himself.

If my brother's not here, then I can't compare myself to him and I'm going to feel better. And so he murders his brother. And of course, we know that didn't work, but the damage had already been done. And so John is telling us, "Don't carry that like Cain did. Don't look at others. And because of their righteousness, somehow believe that if I get rid of them, it'll make me feel better. Don't live that way, John says, verse 13. "But do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

Do not be surprised." This is a warning that John is giving to us. Don't be surprised. This is a pattern of what has been happening. It's been happening since the beginning. It happened with Cain and Abel, and it will continue to happen until the end. John says it happened to the prophets who were before us. It happened to Jesus. John says, "Listen, it happened to the apostles. It has happened to us, and it will probably happen to you." So don't be surprised.

Do not expect the world to understand you if you are a follower of Jesus. Instead, you should expect to be called holier than thou because you're going to be different. And people will not know how to respond. Your difference will make them feel guilty or at the very least uncomfortable, and so they will respond with hate because your righteousness will point out their wickedness.

Therefore, their reaction will be to ridicule you or possibly even eliminate you. Do not be surprised when the world does not understand you, for they did not understand those who came before you, the prophets, Jesus, the apostles. Now here's an amazing truth that John is going to get to. That even amidst the hate that unbelievers have for us, your heart as a follower of Jesus will still go out to them.

You will still love those who hate you. This is the Spirit of Jesus that is living in you. For remember what Jesus said when He was hanging on the cross. This is the Spirit that enters into us. As He's being crucified, Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." The Spirit of God is only love. He does not know what hate is. He cannot have hate. He has 100% love.

And so even as he is being murdered, he says, "Father, forgive them, and the same Spirit will flow through us. This love that you have in you as a follower of Jesus in the face of evil will serve as an assurance of your faith." John goes on, verse 14, "For we know that we have passed from death to life. How? Because we love each other.

For anyone who does not love remains in death." Actually, anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in Him. "Our love for others," John says, "will serve as a sign that our heart has been changed.

It has been transformed because it doesn't make sense any other way." In fact, John says, "If you don't like somebody, if you cannot love them, if you even hate them, your brother, then he says you remain in death and eternal life is not in you." To which I say, "Wow, what a test. Do you love those who are trying to kill you? If not, you're probably not a follower." That seems pretty harsh. What does that mean?

What is this test? This doesn't mean that if you're being hurt by somebody that you don't try to protect yourselves, it doesn't mean that you don't have hurt feelings or emotions or feel sad or have those types of emotions. But it means even in the midst of being persecuted as Jesus was, you recognize they are lost, and so you feel bad for them.

You want them to experience the forgiveness of Jesus. You want them to experience the life in love that comes through Jesus. And so even amidst the persecution, your heart goes out for them. What does this mean? What does it mean to love somebody even in the midst of persecution? What does it mean to love others in a practical way? John's going to tell us, verse 16, "This is how we know what love is." This is the definition.

Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Love, the love that John is talking about, is the willingness to lay down your life for another. In other words, love is dying to selfishness, dying to yourself, and putting others before you. This is the love that Jesus modeled for us. If we're following His example, He laid down His life for us.

And the amazing truth is Scripture tells us that Jesus died while we were still sinners. Jesus didn't die because we were good friends, and he's like, "Hey, man, I really like you. I'm going to do this for you." He didn't die for us because we deserved it or we earned it or we were worth it. Scripture says that He died while we were still sinners. Those that were nailing Jesus to the cross, He died for them in that moment.

That's the kind of love that John is talking about. You can see why a heart transformation is necessary because that type of love is not normal and nobody will understand it who is not a follower of Jesus. It doesn't make sense. He goes on, "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them or compassion, how can the love of God be in that person?"

Dear children, let us not love with words and with speech, but with actions and in truth." If you see a brother in need and have the means to help, you should gladly do it. Do it responsibly. If love is defined as laying down one's life for somebody else, then giving sacrificially out of your plenty should be a no-brainer. Of course, I will do that. John says, "Love is an action. It is a verb.

It's not a feeling. It's not an emotion. Love requires us to move." Therefore, when you give sacrificially, it's not because you feel like it or you have an emotion. That's not love. Love is simply the action of saying, "I'm going to do it," because it's what God has called me to do. He goes on in verse 19, "This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence.

If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, for He knows everything." John knows even as he's sharing this with the early church, and for those that would be reading it later, for us, that there would be times in our life where we will question our heart's intent. And in those moments, the enemy will cause us to doubt if we are truly changed.

He will cause us to doubt whether we have truly experienced the forgiveness of Jesus in our lives. For John knows that we will make mistakes even after a transformed heart. And in those moments, the enemy will rush in to condemn us, to make us doubt. John reminds us to find confidence and peace in our hearts when we have a genuine love for others, that we would find the confidence that, yes, I love others in a way that's not normal.

It's not natural. It must be God loving others through me. So what is our actual responsibility? How does this flesh itself out? John's going to tell us. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, then we can have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask because we keep His commands and do what pleases Him. And this is His command to believe in the name of Jesus His Son, the Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us.

For the one who keeps God's commands lives in Him and He in them. And this is how we know that He lives in us. We will know it by the Spirit He gave us. This is in the easiest terms possible that John could ever give to us and to the church. Our responsibility as followers of Jesus is to love God and to love others. To love God and to love others with the love that He has given us through Jesus Christ, through His Spirit.

We should live life asking the question, as we've already mentioned before, asking, "What does love require of me? How do I love God in this situation? How do I love others? How do we know that He lives in us?" John tells us we know by the Spirit that He has given to us that causes us to love others. Now, one of the things that I've discovered in life is it can be very difficult to see another person's heart.

You can look at their actions and kind of see what they're doing and how they're talking and what motivates them. But I've also found that I can be deceived by others' actions. They can have ulterior motives as to why

they're doing what they're doing. I can't always judge somebody else's heart because I don't know it, but I do know my own heart. John tells me, "Look at your own heart."

What do you see?" You see, phony love talks about compassion, but real love does something to express compassion. And so as I look at my own life, as I look in the mirror, I have to ask myself the question, "Do I love with the love of Jesus? Does my heart show signs of transformation? Has my heart been infused with the love of Jesus that flows through me? Do I have an unnatural compassion for others?"

Can I even love those who disagree with me? Do I love those that don't know Jesus and persecute me, make fun of me, push me to the side? This year, coming up towards the end of this year, we have an election in our country. And so we're going to be talking about the election a little bit and what that means for us as followers of Jesus. I'm not going to shy away from that. I want you to keep in your heart and in your mind as we talk through all of this.

For whatever reason politically in our environment today, it can be so hostile. And you can hate people that don't believe the same thing you believe or have the same ideas that you have or maybe on the other side of the aisle. Can I tell you that as a follower of Jesus Christ, I am called to love everyone that includes those that don't think like I think and don't believe what I believe.

You see, it's easy for us to read these words and John says, "Okay, you're supposed to love others." And you go, "Yeah, I know that. Of course, pastor. Of course we're supposed to love. But what happens when you're in a debate with a family member who's on the other side of the political aisle from you? Do you show love in that moment? It can be hard. It can be difficult."

You see, John actually says, "If you have hate in your heart for others," John's saying, "I would encourage you to really find out where you're at with Jesus." Remember earlier, John said, "It is impossible to truly give your heart to Jesus and then intentionally and continually live in sin or hate." If you really love your brothers or sisters, if you really love people in this church, I would ask the question, how does that love shine?

If you truly do love others, how does that shine? If you love others in your community with the love that Jesus has for them, how does that love shine? What is the action behind that? Because if it doesn't show up in real action, how do you know if it's real love? Today is a great day for you to scan your heart. Look in the mirror. See what you find. Do you find love or do you find something else?

If you find anything but love, John is saying, "Maybe today is the day that you should invite Jesus in and ask for a transformation." You see, as John is speaking to the church, as he's speaking to us, I have to imagine that in his mind, he's thinking about the Old Testament prophets, and he's reminded in Ezekiel. When Ezekiel is seeing a vision of the future, and he says, "Listen, God is going to come, and he is going to take out your heart of stone, and He's going to replace it with the heart of flesh." He's going to take out that heart of stone that is filled with hate that we're all born with when we enter into the sinful fallen world.

He's going to take out that heart if we will allow him, and he will replace it with a heart of flesh. And that heart of flesh allows us to love others in a way that is not natural without that heart. So in those moments that we doubt our salvation or in those moments that we wonder, "Am I being obedient to what God has asked me?" It's really a simple question. Do I love others? Am I loving toward others?

John wants to encourage us while at the same time making us aware, don't be surprised when the world hates you. Don't be surprised when those that don't know who Jesus is maybe say, "Ah, you're just holier than thou. You're just too good for everybody else." Continue to show love. As always, there's going to be an opportunity for prayer.

Maybe you want to pray for an unsaved family member, a friend, a neighbor. Maybe you want to say, "God, I want my heart to be transformed. I'm not sure it has been." The altar is open. If you just want to come and do

your business with God, nobody will bother you. If you want prayer, there'll be people on both sides that would love to pray with you. Let me close. Heavenly Father, thank you for a transformed heart. Thank you for loving us.

Thank you for dying for us while we were still sinners. There's not a single person here that deserves your grace and your mercy. There's not a single person here that deserves your love. But yet you still offer us all those things. And so may we offer it freely to others as well. Please shine through us.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.