

1 John 3:16-24

“What Love Looks Like”

Sometimes, to understand what something is, we need to understand what it isn't. John has been speaking to us of the non-negotiable, absolutely essential element of love for the body of Christ that will be in the child of God. In fact, he went as far as to say that “love for the brethren” was one way in which we could detect (or discern) a child of God from a child of the devil. *That being said, if love is a non-negotiable, essential imperative, then we better have a crystal-clear understanding as to exactly what love is... & Just so there's no confusion on the matter, John began by explaining what love is not.* Look back at **Vs 11-12**. Now look at **Vs 15**.

Even though Cain & Abel were brothers *physically*, they were of a completely different lineage *spiritually*. Cain didn't *love* his brother, he *hated* his brother, that was evident by the fact that he rose up against him, murdered him, lied to God about it, then tried to appear innocent & cover his guilt. Those aren't earmarks of love! *It's not ending someone else's life that bears witness to love, it's the laying down of your own life that demonstrates love.* (Let's remember this stylistic pattern that John has of reasoning from extremes so that his point remains clear & simple to understand). To destroy someone else for *your own* benefit is no show of love, that's a show of hate. But to sacrifice your own life for the blessing/benefit of *another*... that's true love.

Vs 16

We know that the Ch & Vs references aren't inspired of God, they were simply inserted for the sake of order & convenience. But I love the correlation between the gospel of Jn 3:16 & 1st Jn 3:16. In Jn 3:16 we have the familiar passage, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*¹ John writing about the love of God, what He did & why He did it. The sacrifice for others involved *in* it. Here, in 1st Jn 3:16, the sacrifice of Christ is called to our attention again. Yet *here*, not only what He did *for* us, but the net effect that it should yield *in* us as well.

John says, “By this we know love.” That is, this is how we come to understand, to perceive (through experience) what true *love* is. & This would be a great place for us to remind ourselves of how much more articulate & expressive the ancient Greek language was compared to our modern English language.

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 3:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

John is speaking about a very specific kind of love. What we might call *actual*, *legitimate* love. Something foreign to man apart from the intervention & instruction of God. The English language just exercises the 1 word, “love”. The Greek language had at least 4. We rely on context. “I love my wife”, “I love tacos”. Both are true but carry completely different definitions behind the word.

In the Greek language they have the word “Eros”. Which speaks of Erotic, or sexual “love” (which isn’t really love at all, but that’s the label we give it). There’s also “Storgē” which speaks of familial love, the love from a parent to child or siblings. There’s “Philōo” which is the highest expression of love man is capable of apart from God. It’s that *incredibly close brotherly/deep friendship love*. & This is where there can be a lot of hurt & confusion that comes into play when relationships are developing between a man & a woman. He says, “I love you”. He means, “I ‘Eros’ you.” He’s lusting over her, wanting something from her. She interprets his words, “I Philōo you”. They’re on 2 totally different wave lengths & headed for disaster.

What he’s expressing isn’t love at all. She has a lasting relationship in her heart. He wants not much more than lustful gratification. ■ Ultimately, every kind of love that man expresses apart from God is self-serving in some capacity... This relationship serves me, it benefits me, be it emotionally, physically, I scratch your back, you scratch mine, there’s something in it for me.

But *true* love, the kind of love that *God* expresses, is called “Agapē”. It conveys itself *not* in being kind *to* you in order to extract something *from* you. It serves you, gives *to* you & sacrifices *for* you, demanding *nothing* in return *from* you. *Agape simply gives, sacrifices & serves, not because it has to, because it wants to, it’s love for you, it wants nothing in return from you.* & It’s a love so great that it continues to love through wounds, through hurt, though it’s rejected or unappreciated. It doesn’t limit itself to the “lovely”. It loves the unlovable & unappealing...

& It’s by *this* that we know love, because He (Jesus) laid down His life for us. Paul said that like this, *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*² * * Jesus wasn’t a martyr. He willingly (out of love for you & me) laid down His life. He said, *“...I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”*³

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 5:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 10:17-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But it's through His sacrifice for us, gaining nothing in return from us that we come to know (perceive) love. You can't learn God's love anywhere else. People sometimes think they're gonna get out, commune w/nature & learn about God. Truth be told, you can learn quite a bit about God from creation. Surely creation testifies to the vast *power & creativity* of God, the immeasurable *wisdom & intelligence* of God. But what you *won't* learn from nature is of the *love* of God. God demonstrates His love for us through the cross of J.C. His *sacrifice* would make for our *salvation*. Out of His great love, He laid down His life for you... & for me. *

Now... Skin for skin, all that a man has he will give for his life. Self-preservation is the natural order of life. Self-sacrifice is the "supernatural order" of spiritual life.

John is here, basically reiterating what Jesus had taught him. It was common for Jesus to call His disciples attention to the example that He was giving them. How He didn't come to be served but to serve, to give His life away, a ransom for many. He would serve them, lower Himself to lift them up & say, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." ⁴ That's what John is reminding us of here.

Cain... is *not* an example love, Christ is the example of love. You see, true love isn't simply a matter of *not* doing evil to others. It involves actually *doing them good!* As we read in Isa Ch 1, "Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good;" ⁵

That's what Jn is focusing on here. Love isn't found in just the *absence* of evil, but in the *presence* of good. "Laying down our lives for the brethren." & Don't be confused & think that John is calling you to the ultimate sacrifice, dying for the sake of others in the *body*. Should it come to that, then certainly that would be a great/heroic gesture of love! In the grand scope of things, that's a rare calling. To understand this more accurately, John is saying, "& We also ought to lay our lives *aside* for the brethren". We might even think of it like this, "We ought to die to self for the sake of the brethren."

Vs 17-18

John moves us from the *principle*, to the *practical*. From the *exhortation* (we ought to lay our lives down for the brethren) to the *illustration/application*. From the "brethren" in general, to the "brother" in particular. He says, "If you have this world's goods, the resources & wealth of this world (doesn't mean you're rich [though you may be], but you get by).

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 13:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 1:16-17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& You see a brother in need... *Now, I want to elaborate on this for just a minute because John seems to be saying something very specific & I wanna do my best to be true to it. – He says, “Here you are as a child of God. You have plenty, your bills are paid, you got some extra in the bank, you’re doing fine. & You observe a brother in need...” The idea behind this word “sees” in Vs 17 is to “see continually, or, consider regularly”. This isn’t someone on a street corner that you just drove by one day & they’re holding a sign. (John isn’t addressing that situation). This is someone who is on your mind constantly, you see them regularly, you know they have nothing. & It’s not that they’re seeking a handout, but they’d sure be blessed from a hand up. No one is trying to sponge off you, but they’re on your mind. You’re seeing them struggle (maybe they lost their job, maybe a bunch of unexpected expenses came up, maybe their family is large, their pay is small, what finds them there isn’t in view. What’s in view is that you’re aware of it, you’re in a place to do something about it & you’re watching them.) This is the kind of thing Jn is referencing.

He says, “You’re watching this person struggle, you know they have a need. You see it, you’re thinking *about* it & you have the means to help w/it, but you snap shut your heart *against* it.”

Your helping them wouldn’t contribute to the problem, wouldn’t enable them to continue on in the wrong direction, there’s none of that. You’re just turning a blind eye to a need that’s been revealed to you because selfishness (perhaps greed) has its root in you & Jn says, “How then can you say that the love of God abides in you?”

Here’s the point. Love isn’t emotional, it’s not ethereal (not that there’s anything wrong w/having feelings for someone, that’s fine & well), love expresses itself in action, in self-sacrifice & in service for the benefit/blessing of another. *

* James said it this way, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”⁶ Same type scenario. You know they’re hurting, they have a need. “Let me pray for you brother...” You have the means to help, but you don’t do a thing... How has that really helped or demonstrated the love of God at all? True love, if it sees a need, will meet the need if it’s at all able to.

Allow me to say it in a sentence. If God has entrusted you w/this world’s means, then take care to use them for the cause of Christ.

Perhaps there's nothing you can do financially, but you could help out practically. You have a skillset that could aid them. The point is that love goes to work, gets into action. It does something for someone else. & Jn lays it on the line. If we're children of God, we'll reflect this reality. *

It's one reason we encourage you even to be involved & serve in your church. Be a part of building up, encouraging, edifying one another. Needs walk in your church every week, the need to be loved, to be taught, to be encouraged, strengthened. Jesus said that what we do even to the least of these (My brethren) we do unto Him (Matt 25:40). I'm not saying that serving at church is the ultimate fulfillment of this, but it's one avenue through which we can meet needs *for* & be an encouragement *to* one another.

Because the bottom line is that Jn isn't going to let us get away w/loving one another verbally/expressing mushy feelings (my how we love the body of Christ [& all of that]). He's going to put us in check & demand that our lives demonstrate that statement practically. He's saying there will be a *compassion in you* that demands *action from you*.

It's what's expressed in this word "heart" in Vs 17. It's the same root translated "compassion" in Matt 9:36 where we read that Jesus (upon seeing the needs of the multitude) was "move w/compassion" for them because they were weary & scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. His *compassion* stirred Him to *action*. *

& It's not that warm words, comforting kindness isn't important. But when we can, warm words should be accompanied by warm actions should the situation call for it.

Vs 19-21

* When practical acts of love are spilling out *from you*, you can be confident (assured) that truth is at work *in you*. (That you are of the truth). When our lives are manifesting works of love, that will bring a settled assurance to our hearts. Jn has already made it clear back in Ch 2 that it's quite possible to be *ashamed* when Christ appears. But it doesn't have to be that way, you can be *assured*. But that won't happen apart from obedience to the word of God & submission to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in your life.

It sorta goes back to that old illustration. If someone placed you on trial for being a Christian, could they provide enough evidence to prove it? In what way does your life testify to the reality of J.C. in you? How is it that love is at work in you & on display through you? *

Now, we have to acknowledge something here & that is this. It is possible to be right w/God, & yet overly critical of yourself. We also have an enemy who stands before God accusing us day & night, seeking to heap condemnation upon us.

Jn says, “If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, & knows all things.” There you are, you’re being obedient to God’s word, you love J.C., you’re seeking to walk w/sensitivity toward His Spirit, yet you never feel like you measure up. You’re always falling short of the standards you’ve set for yourself & you just feel guilty all the time. Jn says, “Listen, God is greater than your heart. He knows those who are His & your relationship w/Him isn’t predicated upon your feelings, it’s by faith in Him & the promise of His word.” Listen, your heart is deceitful. It’s completely capable of rendering a wrong verdict. There’s a higher court than your heart (for which we thank God).

When you’re feeling the heavy weight of condemnation, yet there’s no apparent sin that God is convicting you of, you’re rendering faithful obedience to His word, His ways. In those times we don’t succumb to our feelings, we stand by faith in Him & the promise of His word.

* “If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.” This is where we want to be. Not wavering in our faith, not listening to the lies of the wicked one or being pulled down by our past... You’re a new creation, old things have passed away, keep confidence toward God! As Paul told Timothy, “...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”⁷ You have placed your faith in the 1 True Living God for whom nothing will be impossible. He has made a way for you where there was no way, He paid a debt He didn’t owe because you owed a debt you couldn’t pay. He demonstrated His love for you in giving His life for you & you have committed your heart, your life, your eternal soul to Him, He is able (more than able) to keep that which you have committed to Him until that Day, keep confidence in J.C.*
Vs 22

Ok. There is context here that we need to be careful to remain in. John isn’t saying that obedience enables you to write a blank check. “God here’s my to do list for today, get to work on that & get back w/me this evening regarding what still needs attention.” Sometimes we treat prayer like that. But we need to remind ourselves that purpose of prayer isn’t to get our will done in heaven (meaning God here’s what I want *You* to do). The purpose of prayer is to get *God’s will done one earth* (God, what would *You* have *me* to do). The one who is rendering obedience, walking in love, is drawing near to the heart of God, walking in line w/the will of God for their life.

⁷ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (2 Ti 1:12). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Consequently, we're not going to be spilling every carnal desire that we have before God, asking Him to fulfill our wish list like He's our own personal Genie. Now, is it *wrong* to let your requests be made known to God? No. Scripture exhorts us to do that. But the heart of prayer is, "Nevertheless, not *my* will, but *thy* will be done."

Yes, God honors obedience, but the obedient disciple is the one who denies himself, takes up his cross, follows Christ. We want to be in that place where God grants us the desire of our heart (meaning, that He places His desire *in* us & we're in line w/that). Paul put it like this, "...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."⁸ The psalmist said it this way, "Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart."⁹ One more, from the lips of our Lord, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you."¹⁰ You see, there's context involved, prerequisites, conditions to be met. Is His word at work *in* me, am I yielded to Him in obedience, you see? Is my heart to please Him or to please myself? My prayer life is connected *to*, or impacted *by* all these things.

Vs 23-24

W/the reference to keeping His commandments, Jn seems to hone in on one specific commandment that serves as the foundation for what he's talking about. But he parses it out in two ways. Essentially, 2 sides of the same coin. They ultimately serve the same point. * He says, "This is God's commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son, J.C."

The idea here is not one of mental assent, "I believe a Man named Jesus walked the earth, was a historical figure & all that..." It speaks of placing all your weight in, committing yourself to, being confident in Him to be your salvation.

To believe in His "name", the word "name" speaks not of a title, but of all that a Person represents. You place your absolute confidence in the fact that Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God, all powerful, all knowing, the spotless Lamb of God who shed His blood, not only for mankind generally, but for you personally. He died, was buried & 3 days later rose from the dead that you might stand justified before God by faith in Him. He ascended to the right hand of God where He ever lives to make intercession for you & you place the confidence of your eternal salvation in the fact that He is every bit of who He said He was, God come in the flesh to seek & to save that which was lost... You believe on His name. *

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ps 37:4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Jn 15:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Close “& Love one another.” To believe on His name is to love one another. This isn’t unlike the words of Jesus when the lawyer came to Him asking Him, “Teacher which is the great commandment of the law?” & Jesus said, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’¹¹ They’re 2 commandments, but they’re essentially 1. To love God is to love others.

& This obedience is evidence of abiding in Him, Him abiding in you. The Holy Spirit bearing witness (which we will touch on next time).

Prayer Points:

Father, may we walk in love & serve one another. May we render obedience from the heart & sensitivity to the prompting of Your Spirit. & May Your will be done in/through our lives, not ours. Be glorified in us, shed Your grace upon us & strengthen us to do Your will.

“This is God’s commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son J.C.” Are you ready? Ready to *believe* on the *name* of J.C. To place all your confidence, your conviction in Him, to trust Him to save you & give you eternal life? Don’t put it off another day, leave here a new creation.

¹¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 22:37–40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.