

1 John 3:11–18

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- [0 : 0 0] This is what the Lord's Word says. This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.
- ! 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.
- Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.
- Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.
- 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.
- [1 : 0 8] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Let me add my word of welcome here to Christ Church Chicago this morning.
- We're so glad that you are here and that you have joined us this morning. As we continue this morning in our series, The Gospel at Work.
- Really outlining four aspirations, biblical aspirations, the pastors here hold dear and believe should corporately drive our pursuits as a church.
- We come today to the third in the series and perhaps the most critical and costly of them all.
- Pastor Helm and I were talking about this this past week. The first aspiration of proclaiming might cost us some ridicule and some mockery.
- [2 : 1 7] The second aspiration you heard last week of sending might cost us some money, some sweat equity.
- But today's aspiration will cost us everything. If you turn on the radio, scroll through a playlist or glance at the billboard charts, you will find that one of the most popular themes that shows up cutting across all genres, styles, cultures, eras, is the theme of love.
- Everyone sings about it. From the Beatles declaring all you need is love. To simultaneously saying you can't buy me love.
- To Whitney Houston telling us the greatest love of all is found within. To Beyonce being crazy in love. Brother Josh to the rock band Foreigner wanting to know what love is.
- Stevie Wonder just picked up the phone to call to say I love you. And Roberta Flack is wondering where is the love. Kids, even Disney and the Lion King had Simba and Nala singing, can you feel the love tonight?
- [3 : 4 9] Our world is obsessed with the idea. I even tried my hand at it.
- Early, early, early in my fledgling music career. I was in my early twenties.

I was in my early twenties. A label was looking for love songs for a Valentine's Day album they were doing. And I submitted a song called Love Can't Be Right When It's Wrong.

And no, you can't hear it. The label rep told me I should just probably stick to gospel music.

Speaking of gospel church, yes, we get in on the love train. That's the OJs if you didn't.

[4 : 50] We get in on the love train too. Singing joyfully about the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God.

And I could sing of your love forever. That's beautiful and wonderful and absolutely worth singing about. But here's the rub.

While we sing often about how much God loves us and how we love God, we sing very little about our love for one another.

We clearly love to sing about love, but John challenges the church in our passage this morning that love is more than a lyric. It's a lifestyle.

Love is not just a chorus we repeat. It's a cross we carry. Love is not proven by our playlist, but by our practice.

[5 : 53] Love is the believer's ID card. It's our birthmark. It's how we know you are who you say you are.

John puts it this way in our text. It's how we know we've passed from death to life because we love one another.

Here it is, church. Here's the bottom line and how I'd like to tag this message this morning. The proof of life is love.

How do we know we're in a church that's vibrant and alive? By how we love one another. How do we see the gospel active and at work in our church?

By how we love one another. If we don't execute this fundamental principle, church, if we don't get this right, we've missed everything.

[7 : 00] The proof of life is love. The first verse in our passage really serves as the thesis for the text.

Verse 11. This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. John refers back to this core principle they heard at the beginning of their Christianity and reminds them and us how fundamental loving one another is to the faith.

He says, look, you've heard this before. This is the message you got from the very first day. You heard the gospel. You know Christ came to die in our place and for our sins.

And if anything is Christianity 101, this is it. Love one another. These are the basics. It's not something new.

It's as real as the experience of the Christian life when Jesus Christ comes in to your heart. The proof of life is love. So what have you heard?

[8 : 09] You've heard John chapter 15 verse 12 where Jesus says, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. This is the message you've heard.

Later in verse 13, that same chapter, he says, these things I command you so that you'll love one another. Even earlier here in verse 13, John says, beloved, I'm writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.

This is the message we've heard. And that basic Christian message has not changed. Perhaps some have thought because Christians talk a lot about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which is the most important relationship you will ever have.

And if you don't, I'd love to show you how to get one. Meet me right here after church. But we talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, almost as if it's only us and Jesus that matters.

But the fact of the matter is, the natural expression or outflow and proof of that relationship with Jesus is how we treat one another.

[9 : 41] How we love one another. Especially those within the body. Now, sometimes in the Bible, we are taught truth by means of contrast.

This is one of those passages in scripture. The rest of this passage, John gives us both a negative picture and a positive picture about what love for one another should and should not look like.

On the negative side, verses 12 through 15, John says, look, you don't want to be like this dude named Cain. You might be familiar with the story of Cain and Abel from Genesis chapter 4 about the first homicide in the Bible.

Now, Cain kills Abel, his brother, because of Cain's wickedness. Cain's hatred for his brother was fueled by jealousy and envy.

They came from the same family. They sat around the same devotional tables. They ate the same meals together. They were disciples in whatever way they were by the same parents. Yet Cain was wicked and Abel was righteous.

[11 : 09] Cain's offering to God was not accepted and Abel's was. This drove Cain crazy. Cain's wickedness could not stand Abel's righteousness.

Cain's jealousy became hate. And his hate led him to murder his own brother. Church, hate is the opposite of love.

Love gives for others' lives and does what is best for them. Hate takes the life of others and does what is worst for them.

Hate wishes the other person was not there. Hate really is the seed behind all murder. Though not all hate leads to physical murder, they are intrinsically related.

Put a pin there. We'll come back to that thought in a moment. Cain, dare I say, is a pretty clear example of not loving one another.

[12 : 22] When you kill your own brother? Why? Because the scripture says Cain was of the evil one. Those who hate one another do not belong to God.

It's not me talking. That's the Bible. Pop back up quickly to verse 10. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. Your Honor, may I enter into evidence exhibit A.

Cain. To be clear, all humanity is divided into these two families. You either belong to God or you belong to the devil.

Yeah, I know that sounds harsh. But the Bible says there's no real middle ground on this matter. You can't say, well, I'm not really into that whole loving one another thing, but I'm not a hater.

[13 : 28] I just try to mind my own business, not get in anybody's way, not hurt anybody, just walk the middle ground. But the Bible says, no, that's not the choice.

The two choices are to be with God or be without God. To have the father of light or belong to the father of lies. To belong to the righteous one or the evil one.

Here it is. Either you love one another or you hate one another. Because the proof of life is love.

Get this, church. Darkness hates light. Satan hates God. Cain hated Abel. The Pharisees hated Jesus.

Darkness. All that is needed for darkness to stir with hate is for light to shine just a little bit. People living in the light are not comfortable for those who are living in darkness.

[14 : 32] Because a bright light hurts your eyes when you turn it on. You wake up in the morning. As a result, as a result, now knowing all of this, John says in verse 13 that, church, you shouldn't be surprised that the world hates you.

My kids would say, haters gonna hate. They hate you because you've proven through your love for one another that you have passed from death to life.

And now you live in the light. But before you shall, John concludes this portion of our text in verse 15 with a warning and some strong language.

He says, if you don't love, then just like Cain, you live in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

And you know murder and eternal life don't go too well together. Remember I told you earlier that hate and murder were intrinsically related.

[15 : 48] Yeah, I'm up here and I can see what you're thinking from all the way up here. Well, I haven't murdered anybody. So he couldn't possibly be talking to me.

The truth of the matter is, murder really is the outward act of inward hate. When you hate someone, what are you feeling?

What are you thinking? What are you really saying? You're saying, I wish you were not around. I wish you would disappear. I wish you would not bother me.

I wish you would be gone from my life because my life would be so much better if I didn't have to deal with you and your personality. I wish you did not exist.

I wish you would be so much better if I could.

[17 : 11] But John doesn't let us get away with that. Love is not the absence of hate. Love is the presence of something else. What is that?

Well, in the example of Cain, we've seen what love isn't. Now in verses 16 through 18, let's see what love is. The first part of verse 16, by this we know love.

Here's what it is. Here's what it is. That he laid down his life for us. If you want to know what love is, look no further than Jesus.

The supreme example of what love is, is preeminently displayed in what Jesus did on the cross. What kind of love is that?

Calvary love. Calvary love. Bleeding love. Suffering love. Dying love. Painful love. Jesus laying down his life for our sin and our shame and our eternal salvation.

[18 : 17] Don't talk about sentimental love that only loves in words and feelings. Go to the cross and see what real love is.

It's bloody, selfless, exhausting, painful, total, complete. Romans chapter 5, verse 8.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, he died for us.

There is no greater example of what love is than in what God did for us through Christ. Every church, it's not just the death of Jesus in itself that is the ultimate demonstration of love.

It's the death of Jesus together with what he did for us that shows the epitome of love. What do I mean? If I'm standing on a pier and a man runs and jumps in the water and cries out with his last breath, I'm giving my life for you.

- [19 : 32] Why? I can't really comprehend that act as an act of love. That just seems a little weird to me. But if that same man jumps in the water to save me from drowning and gives his own life so I can survive, I can fully understand how the giving of his life was a great act of love.
- That's what Jesus did for us. We cannot truly know what love is apart from that story. The world wants to define love for you.
- But to know love is to know Jesus. Anything else is a deceptive imitation. Anything else is dead.
- The proof of life is love. Now, here's where the rubber begins to meet the road. I remember once trying to return something to the store without a receipt.
- I walked up to the counter with all the confidence in the world, holding this gadget I hadn't even opened in my hand, and said, hey, I'd like to return this and get my money. The cashier looked at me and said, do you have the receipt?
- [21 : 05] True story. I smiled, trying to charm my way through it. No. But look, it's brand new. It's still in the box.
- It's never been touched. So she says, so you can't prove you bought it. Well, no, not technically.
- She looked at me and she looked real closely at the box. And then she looked back at me and she said, sir, well, it really doesn't matter anyway.
- What do you mean it doesn't matter? Well, it doesn't matter because this is from Target. And you are in Walmart.
- I was in the wrong store. And I had no proof that I even made the purchase, even if it was the right store.
- [22 : 17] Hear me. Look at what Jesus did. Jesus proved his love and produced receipts through his death for us on the cross.
- He's our example. He's our example. He's our example. Now, get this. Buckle up. Hold on. Because in the second part of this verse, here's the command.
- And the command in this verse is, now we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. Wow.
- In other words, we have to be prepared to produce receipts. Told you in the beginning, this would cost everything.
- This is why love is so much more difficult than pop stars on the billboard chart to make it out to be. It requires so much more than just general sentiment of goodwill.
- [23 : 24] To really love your brother is to lay your life down for him. It requires you to die to yourself, which means to sacrifice yourself.
- It means to sacrifice your time, sometimes sacrifice your reputation, sacrifice your resources, sacrifice your comfort and well-being for the sake of your brother or sister.
- Look, of course, we love our children. We love our grandchildren. We love our spouses. We love people who love us.
- We love people who treat us well. We love nice people. We love people who are good to us.
- That's not hard. That's just what common grace people do. They love people like them. They love people who love them. But will we love when it means we have to bear burdens that we'd rather not be bothered with?
- [24 : 31] Will we love when the people we love do not return the love to us? Will we love those who don't look like us, talk like us, worship like us, matriculate at the same school as us, or maybe not have gone at all?

Will we love them? Will we lay down our lives for those who are unlovely, undeserving, ungrateful? Isn't that what Christ did for us when we were unlovely, undeserving, and ungrateful?

People, I get it. I get it. Really, I do. Life is hard. Some of you come here and you have deep hurts.

Spouses have hurt you. Bosses have hurt you. Kids have disappointed you. Parents have hurt you. Even in some cases, maybe a church has hurt you. What do you do?

How do you respond to someone who trashes you, betrays you, says all kinds of things about you, and makes your life miserable? Sometimes you feel like the one stricken, smitten, and afflicted.

[25 : 44] And yet you're called to lay down your life. And yet you're called to return good for evil, and to bless though you've been cursed, and to love though you're hated.

You ask, what would Jesus do? I'm telling you what Jesus did. It's our desire that this church would have a reputation of laying down our lives for each other.

Yes, we're called to love those outside the church. We're called to love the lost. But this particular text is speaking about brothers and sisters, about the family of God.

Later in chapter 4 of this book, John, still talking about love, will go on to say in verse 20, If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar.

For he who does not love his brother, who he has seen, cannot love God who he hasn't seen. Can we love one another like that?

[26 : 53] I'm not just talking about big lofty things. I would give my kidney for you. We often consider ourselves ready to lay down our lives in one great, dramatic, heroic gesture.

But most of us, God is calling us to lay down our lives piece by piece, little by little, in small but important ways every single day.

Would you just give up your seat for someone else? Would you give up your evening? Would you give up a phone call? Would you overlook slights and keep quiet instead of passing along unfavorable reports?

Loving each other in this body means honoring others above ourselves. Giving each other the benefit of the doubt. Being slow to anger. Abounding steadfast in love.

Being thankful when others outstrip us in righteousness. Instead of being jealous and hateful like Cain. That's what it means to love one another.

[28 : 05] Now, it would be easy to affirm the central message here and think, okay, don't hate. Don't murder.

Love. Love. Sounds good. Let's go. But John doesn't let us get away with love in general. He wants us to put it into practice.

Verse 17, John takes us down to street level where life is lived in Chicago at 6154 South Woodlawn Avenue on a Sunday morning.

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?

Doesn't say what kind of need. Doesn't say how he came to need it. Circumstances, tragedies, personal choices. All it says is brother in need.

[29 : 07] Brother, meaning fellow Christian. If a Christian sees a fellow Christian in need and closes his heart to him, turns his back, feels no compassion for him in his distress, wishes him well without extending a hand, But how does God's love live in him?

God's kind of love doesn't move away from need. God's love focuses outward, not just inward. God's love is outward.

And when God's love is in us, it can't help but produce the same thing from us. Verse 18, John says, Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

Translation, stop talking about it and be about it. We don't need more words, especially in the climate that we live in today.

What we need is proof. And the proof of life is love. You say you want to build up a multi-ethnic cross-cultural church that proclaims Jesus Christ to everyone and displays the gospel everywhere.

[31 : 12] Well, it starts right here. You must love one another. This is the message John says you've heard from the beginning.

This is the message many of you have known your whole life. The message you heard in Sunday school. The message you sing about. The message you've heard in umpteen sermons and Bible studies.

It's a familiar message, but it's God's message for Christ Church Chicago. A church without love is a church without life.

We must love one another. Pastor Joe, where do I start? I mean, there are 8 billion people in the world.

What am I going to do? Well, just look around you. There are a couple hundred people right here in this room.

[32 : 11] Here's the place to start. These brothers and sisters that God has placed you with by his providence in this room, in this place.

How might we lay down our lives and love one another in deed and in truth with a generous hand and an open heart, not like Cain, but like Christ?

Saints, the proof of life isn't how much scripture you can quote. It's not the eloquence of your prayers. It's not how loud you sing or how long you've been in church.

The proof of life is love. Love that gets up when it rather sit down.

Love that gives when it would rather keep. Love that forgives when it would rather fight. Love that listens more than it talks. Love that lays it all down and gives it all up.

[33 : 18] Love that looks like Jesus, just like Jesus, who laid it all down and gave it all up for us at the cross.

He proved he loved us. Now, our love for one another is the proof that he lives in us.

The proof of life. It is love. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for loving us.

Thank you for your sacrifice. Sending your son to die for us and proving his love for us while we were yet sinners, being willing to give his life.

May we follow that example. Right here in this church, amongst the people that we see every week, that we worship with, that we serve with.

[34 : 26] May we be the example, the proof that God is alive in us by how we treat our brother and our sister.

By how we love one another. In your son's name we pray. Amen.