

1 John 3:11–24

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[0:00] I read the passage. 1 John chapter 3 beginning in 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. For 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, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

[1:07] 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.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. For whenever our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God. And whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us.

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us by the spirit whom he has given us. The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Amen. Just a brief prayer.

[2:19] Father, your word lays open before us. It is the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom, your royal law, your very living oracles.

In it, your plans and purposes for humanity are unfolded and your glorious son is revealed. Now in these next moments together, may we receive your word well. The very gospel to which we have been entrusted.

So that we may live unto you well and that we may impart its treasure to others. Amen. In 2010, an informal survey was taken among four to eight-year-olds.

It was a single question survey asking this, what does love mean? What does love mean? Here are a few of the answers. When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore.

So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love. Love is when mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him to make sure it tastes okay.

[3:37] Love is when you tell a guy that you like his shirt, then he wears it every day. Love is when mommy gives daddy the best piece of chicken.

Lauren, age four, writes or responds, I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and she has to go out and buy new ones.

Lastly, Karen, age seven, says this, when you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you. All that to say, oh, I actually asked my daughters this morning, I said, Carissa, age four, what does love mean?

She says, love means hugging. And Adeline, my two-year-old, says, love means popo, which means kiss or smooch or hug. All that to say, what children recognize is that love is visibly manifest through action.

It is not simply a spoken, it is not simply spoken and verbally affirmed, but it is embodied through act and deed. Love is not only heard audibly, but it is seen visibly.

[5 : 03] It is as the popular adage reminds us, love is in action. Love, as we'll find out this morning, moves beyond word or talk, for it must occur in deed and truth, according to verse 18.

In the text this morning, the author, presumably John, advances his development on the thought of Christian love. He actually has introduced the thought in chapter 2. Mention it periodically, and he's moving toward this masterful treatise in chapter 4, beginning in verse 7.

Chapter 3, verse 11, where we find ourselves this morning, has been recognized as the midway point of this letter. In the first half, he has addressed the opposition, focusing in on God as light and truth.

We see that in chapter 1, verse 5. This is the message of what we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light. This morning, we find ourselves in 3.11.

This is the message, the second time he uses this word, that you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another. He has told his readers already what not to love, namely the world, in chapter 2, verse 15.

[6 : 19] And this morning, he will give himself to telling us, the believer, the object of what our love should be. You and I might assume John's command should be, that the object of our love should be God himself.

It should read something like, do not love the world, instead love God. But that's not what he says. At all, actually. You may think that this is foundational.

But for John, one's love for God is not in the forefront, actually falls to the periphery. He is actually quite dismissive of human love for God.

How can I say that? In chapter 4, verse 10, he writes this. Paraphrasing it, this is love. Not that we love God, but God loves us.

His primary concern is the demonstration of love for the brothers, the brethren, the family of faith.

[7 : 22] Because it is a sign to which family you and I belong to, namely, either the family of God or the family of the devil, according to 3, verse 10.

This morning, I want to give us two points. The first is a contrasting picture. A contrasting picture, 11 through 18.

John turns his readers backwards and summons two lives, two visual, tangible examples. One depicting a picture of what love is not, and the second depicting a picture of what love is.

One picture is this, the tragic example of Cain. The narrative is found in Genesis 4. Genesis 3, you might be familiar, being students of the Bible, we have seen the disobedience of Adam and Eve, shunning God's instructions, resulting in moving from a position of life to moving into a position of death.

They were created in a state of truly living. And in Genesis 3, they found themselves to be dying. Sons of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, were both brought offerings before the Lord.

[8 : 40] Cain brought the fruit of the ground. Abel brought a firstborn from among his flocks. Not many details are given in the Genesis account. Simply that Abel's offering was accepted, and Cain's was rejected.

The narrative records that Cain was angry, and as a result, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him. It's staggering to see in just a few chapters that in Genesis chapter 2, you have God fashioned in humanity and breathing life, divine life in them.

In chapter 4, you have that same humanity taking life and giving, bringing death. you cannot help but get a sense of creation gone wrong.

Chapter 4, the very taking of life, its cessation, the graphic and horrific depiction of what it means to move from life to death.

Genesis hints that the cause was anger. Cain was angry. John elaborates more here and says it's actually envy and jealousy were in play, so much so that he took his younger brother's life.

[9 : 57] It's the antithesis of love, namely hatred manifest in murder. Cain confirmed that he was diabolic of the devil by nature.

Being forewarned of his sinful condition, he failed to heed the warning that God gave to him. The sin, Cain, is crouching at your door and its desire is to rule over you.

He didn't give heed. Instead, he rose up and slew Abel. It may startle you to see that John equates hatred with murder.

It seems so extreme. If I hate someone, I don't actually murder them. But however, we need to be reminded in God's eyes, motive and action are equally condemnable in God's moral economy. Let me say that again. Motive, what you think, what you fashion in your head, and action, what you play out in your life, are both equally condemnable in God's moral economy.

[11 : 12] You remember when Jesus in Matthew chapter 5, he instructs them, you shall not murder. You've heard that you shall not murder.

Whoever murders is liable to judgment. And then, all of a sudden, he incorporates this. But I say to you, if you even get angry, you fall under the exact same judgment.

He's able, Jesus is able to combine these two as one because motive and action stand before God as equally condemnable.

This is the human predicament, is it not? Our actions, our outward actions may be clean and law-abiding, but our motives and our consciences are stained and our law-breaking.

For many of us, the human law courts would declare us innocent, good, great citizens, outwardly righteous, but in the divine law court, we stand condemned, corrupt, and in contempt.

[12 : 19] The world wants only outward righteousness. The gospel demands both. Inward and outward righteousness.

This is the indictment of the gospel. God demands not only righteous actions as we saw last week, but a clean heart before Him. hatred and murder are life-taking.

Murder is the taking of physical life, yet hatred acts similarly, does it not? To take life is simply not the halting of biological and chemical processes in a human, but it is the stripping of human dignity, value, and worth in an individual that deserves it.

And why do they deserve it? Because God has fashioned humanity, granted His image. They are His divine image bearers, so they are intrinsically valuable.

Following the flood narrative, there is actually the first command against taking life. Don't take life. And the Genesis account doesn't say don't take life because it's gruesome, it's heinous, it's terrible.

[13 : 28] Don't take life because all humans are made in the Mago Dei. they bear God's image.

Since humanity bears the divine image, we are to uphold the dignity, worth, and justice for it is the preservation of life. You don't have to live long to discover that you can kill someone without a physical weapon.

We should be disgusted by human exploitation, poverty, and racial inequality. Why? Because it is the taking of life. it is the diminishing of dignity and intrinsic worth.

This is the very action that John defines as hate. Whether it be an internal motive of hatred, or the external action of murder, if your orientation is bent that way, no eternal life abides in you.

For these, they simply prove that they are children of the devil. Once again, 3 verse 10. However, for you and I, hatred is not harbored by us.

[14 : 41] Instead of dispensing hatred, get this, we are its recipients, according to verse 13. We are not to be surprised by this.

It is the nature of this rivalry. The world, namely the children of the devil, those who emulate Cain, those who dwell in the realm of death, are opposed to you. The world hates you.

If you became a Christian to be liked, you picked the wrong team. As Christians, we have relinquished the possibility of being welcomed and accepted by the world.

The world's task is to deprive you of life. Therefore, we are those who must find life elsewhere. after presenting us the tragic example of Cain, John now offers to us the superior example of Christ.

We are those who are to love one another. But what does that look like? Well, it's embodied in Christ laying down his life. If Cain rose up to take life, Christ laid down to give life.

[15 : 56] Cain rose up to take life. Christ laid down to give life. Therefore, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. The Christian is not a life taker, but is to behave in such a way that imparts life to others.

This is the giving nature of love, some have called it. It's self-sacrificing for the benefit, the well-being, the ultimate flourishing of another. How are we to lay down our lives?

The word used is actually to hazard yourself, to go out of your way, to take risk on behalf of another. It's unlikely that you and I will give our lives in the same way Jesus died.

Surely it would not be an atoning death. But where can we start? Well, John gives us the answer. It's not heroic acts of martyrdom that we need.

Rather, it's heroic acts of material generosity and sacrifice. Verse 17 reads, 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?

[17:10] We are those who bear one another's burdens. Burdens of the heart, but also material and financial burdens, both individually and collectively.

We try to practice on the second Sunday of every month, a deacon offering, where these funds are to dispense for the care of our congregation, those in need, where to be those who emulate what was described of the early church, that they came together and they sold their possessions and belongings, distributing the proceeds so that to all as any had need.

It's interesting to see as they did this, the Bible tells us the Lord added to their number day to day those who were being saved. Love and self-sacrifice are life-giving.

It's exemplified in the supreme example of Jesus. To summarize verses 11 through 18, I was helped by John Stott.

He writes this, the teaching in this passage is about hatred and love. Hatred characterizes the world whose prototype is Cain.

[18:27] It originates in the devil, issues in murder, and is evidence of spiritual death. Love characterizes the church whose prototype is Christ. It originates in God, issues in self-sacrifice, and is evidence of eternal life.

So firstly, we see a contrasting picture. Secondly, we will see a comforting word.

A comforting word. Upon seeing the contrast of Cain and Christ, John anticipates our thought process. On our best days, our manifestation of love is nowhere near the two pictures of Christ given.

To be honest, we are far more like Cain than Christ. We harbor far more hatred and jealousy than self-sacrifice and charity.

The question your mind might be asking is who can actually stand under the weightiness of verses 16, 17, and 18? Who can die for another?

[19:37] Who hasn't turned a blind eye to need? And as a result, our consciences and our hearts suffer from this self-accusation.

We are self-condemning, loathing, and shame and guilt. Instead of those who are able to stand confidently without shame, we are those who shrink back. We are clouded by darkness and we are troubled by our inability to live up to such standards.

It is this that John begins to address in verse 19. Which reads, by this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.

What are we to do when moments of insecurity overtake us? Well, John's solution is this. John tells us to look outside ourselves, reminding us that our security is not founded within, but it rests with him, namely God himself.

He is the subject of verse 20. Even when our hearts condemn us, note this, he doesn't say, oh, pause and search and think about.

[20:54] Search yourself. Talk to others. Read books. Meditate. Instead, he reminds us, turn your gaze upward. Lift your eyes up to the hills.

And where does your help come from? Your help comes from the maker of heaven and earth. Look toward God. God is greater than your heart.

And God knows everything. See, our assurance is anchored in God and God alone. Never in our own ability to generate feelings of confidence.

John is urging us to understand that God is the final say in our personal well-being. We don't look into our hearts to see if we feel secure and then use this as evidence of our security.

No. If our conscience condemns, God overrides the verdict. It's possible for two reasons. He's greater than your heart and he knows far more than you could ever imagine.

[22:02] He understands us better than our own hearts know ourselves and in his omniscience he knows that our often weak attempts to obey him actually spring from this from our allegiance to him.

John will build on this in the next chapter. As believers we desire to affirm our love for God but as I mentioned already he seemingly dismisses this human love for God.

He says don't base your assurance on how much you love God. Instead according to chapter 4 verse 10 base your assurance on how much God loves you and sent his son as a propitiation as a covering as a pardon as a penalty taker for your sins.

There will be days where everything goes wrong. There will be days where it's shameful that you identify as a Christian. I have a devout Jewish friend from high school.

and I remember as I disclosed to him I'm a Christian and he said Christian you a Christian well you sure don't act and speak like one to my shame.

[23 : 23] This was 1997 just recently via social media he reached out to me and said Bing you're the only pastor I know help me understand this world.

Marred in shame vindicated in the end by God for his gospel. God there will be seasons in your life where circumstance may drive you to doubt your feelings if like mine are incredibly fickle and if you dare root your confidence and assurance on the shifting sands of your emotions you will find yourself frequently in despair.

Be reminded that assurance arises not from within rather it will come from him apart from yourself. It is a word received spoken to you from him.

1994 I believe was the year where they released the first film that brought me to tears Disney The Lion King. In it it tells the story of I'm sure many of us have watched it Simba who had lost his way thinking that his actions had led to the death of his father he was wallowing in shame self condemnation running from his place in the world namely to be king over his pride.

He was self condemned and in this scene you have him walking through a field and a crazy monkey by the name of Rafiki comes up to him and starts haggling him and Simba wants him to go away and he's and he's and Simba asks Rafiki hey who are you anyways and Rafiki turns around and asks him a strikingly pointed question question no is who are you and Simba goes on and says I thought I knew I don't know anymore he's like well I know who you are let me show you and they run through some shrubbery and woods and they come to a lake and a pond and there Rafiki having shared with Simba that he knew his father his late father says go look look at the reflection and Simba looks down in the water and says that's just me and he goes no look harder and as he looks his image changes and morphs into his father but the striking picture is when the heavens open up and there a visible depiction of his father with a grand voice says

[26 : 20] Simba you are my son a voice from outside himself coming to him to reassure him who he was by birth in the same way your assurance comes from a heavenly voice to your downcast heart to remind you who you are by rebirth you are a son of God you are a daughter of the king you are according to chapter 3 verse 1 look at how much God loves you so much so that we call ourselves children of

God and the double emphasis is there and so we are take confidence none can remove that status not even your own heart well as I close our consciences are fallible our gut instincts are marred by our sinful nature even when we are thinking the most clearly we are fogged by our fallenness we are mere humans with life fleeting from us we are in need of something entirely other to reconfigure us namely the gospel that which plagues all of humanity the movement from life to death Jesus in the gospel moves us from death to life according to verse 14 the gospel reality does not change it cannot change it will not change for it is the gospel of the enduring!

the same yesterday today and forever more perhaps your confidence is wavering this morning perhaps your heart and your conscience are seared and self condemning perhaps you find your likeness far more like Cain than Christ may you look towards 3 verse 16 that Christ was not only a moral example but by this we know love that he laid down his life for for for for for for us it's a genuine offering a giving of his life on behalf of you a life given and imparted to you this morning may you not leave disheartened and dejected rather may you be reminded this morning that God himself gave up his life so that you may pass from death to life this is the greatest scandal of the death of Jesus it is this the very world that crucified him is the same world for which he died he was hated and despised crucified and murdered as a demonstration of love toward the hater and the murderer today know this that even

Cain can become a child of God and may it be so may it be so father we thank you and lord your scriptures tell us this is your commandment and may you enable us to do so believe in the name of your son and love one another may you accomplish that in our lives through the imparting of your

holy spirit and my prayer lord is that within our congregation you would stir up our affections for you and for one another so much so that every need every material need among us is dispelled not for our own comfort but for your glory and father i pray oh a bold prayer that when it's all said and done i don't know 50 years down the line when church historians write about what happened on the south side of chicago they would say it was just like new england something happened that the world cannot attribute to economic reform or reform in education or social programs but a revival broke out because the spirit of god fell upon the people of god to change the world of god and father i pray in your mercy that it would be unleashed not only in this congregation but in every congregation in this city to the testament of your glory and your saving power and so whether on in this life or the next preferably!
in this life that many will marvel of the king who reigns supreme oh help us to this end we ask these things for jesus sake amen