

Love One Another!

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Date: 27 February 2011

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[0 : 0 0] passage in 1 John chapter 3. There's a saying or a terminology that's used in hostage negotiations or in kidnap situations. I don't know if you've ever been in one of these situations but you might have seen a movie with the title of this term. It's called Proof of Life. It was a kind of mildly entertaining movie with Russell Crowe and the woeful, woeful, woeful Meg Ryan.

You should check it out. It's called Proof of Life and it's based on this term. In hostage negotiations, in kidnap cases, the negotiators, the cops or whoever are dealing with it, need to know proof of life for the missing person before they can continue with the negotiations.

They want to know, is the person alive? Are they in good health? And so they do this through a few means. They might have a phone conversation or they might get a photograph with that day's paper, a newspaper or something like that. There's different ways of ascertaining proof of life in these situations. Now, interesting thing with tonight's passage is that in the book of John and in the letters of John, indeed in most of what John has written for us, he uses the term life as a synonym for eternal life or faith in Jesus. He uses it as a term for genuine faith in Jesus, that you have life. It means that you have faith and by implication eternal life. And so in the book of John, John gives us some very clear evidences for our own proof of life, our own proof of spiritual life. I think Matt talked about this in the first week.

John gives a few examples or a few evidences for whether your faith is genuine, whether you have proof of spiritual life within you. He has three major ones. The first one is the test of truth.

So do you love truth? Do you love the truth of the gospel that Jesus, the sinless man, died on the cross for the sins of the world, was raised again for our salvation? The truth of the gospel. Do you love truth? Do you love doctrine? Do you love the gospel of Jesus? That's one test of true faith. Do you love the truth? The second one is the test of morality. So you saw this last week and the week before.

[2 : 2 8] Are you living a moral life? Are you living a godly life? Are you walking in the light rather than the darkness? Are you living as a child of God and not a child of the devil? We saw that last week.

Are you striving every day to live a godly life? Are you striving to persevere? Are you turning away from sin, repenting and coming back to God? Are you regularly asking for forgiveness for the times that you do stumble? Are you aware of your own sin and are striving to live a godly life? That's the test of morality. And then there's a third test we're going to talk about tonight and it's the test of love. And I reckon this is probably in the forefront of John's mind, of these three tests that are all very important. I think this test is at the forefront of John's mind as he writes his letter, the test of love. Do you love your neighbour? Do you love your brothers and sisters? And the thing about these tests is you can't just pass one out of three and you can't just pass two out of three. John says you need to be passing three out of three every day.

He says if you're passing these three tests, if you are loving the truth of the gospel, if you are living a moral life, and he doesn't mean a perfect life, none of us will live a perfect life, but if you're striving to live a godly life, and if you're loving your brothers and sisters, then you can be assured that you have genuine faith. It's the proof of your spiritual life.

And so 1 John is really meant to be a real encouragement to Christians. That Christians are meant to read that about the truth and about morality and about love, and they're meant to think to themselves, you know, I do love the truth. I am striving to live a godly life, and I do love those around me. I can be assured that I have true faith in Christ.

It's one of the most frequent questions that I get in my pastoral conversations with you guys, is that very question, how do I know if I have genuine faith? It's a really good question.

[4 : 48] Some of you have asked me, you know, maybe it's just that I was brought up in a Christian home, and others have said maybe it's just that I really enjoy hanging out with Christians at the church, or maybe it's just that there are a lot of really good looking girls at Holy Trinity, you know. It's hard to say exactly what our motives are all of the time for being Christians.

John says, you can be assured that your faith is genuine if you love the truth, if you're seeking to live a moral life. And I think above all else, you love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

We're going to see that in the passage tonight. Before we do that, let's pray together. Father, we bow our heads and acknowledge you as our great God. We thank you so much for giving you this great word in the Bible.

We thank you so much that John, one of the very closest friends of Jesus, was inspired to write these letters. And we thank you so much for the encouragement that they give us, that we are children of God.

Lovers of the truth. Lovers of godliness. And lovers of people. And I pray tonight that you would seek out those areas in our lives where we're not loving others as we ought to.

[6 : 11] And that we would seek to love one another as you would have us. Please help us, above all, to look to our great example tonight.

The perfect example. The perfect man. Jesus Christ. We pray that we would seek to live more and more like him every day. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. So if you take up your Bibles, we're going to just start out at a little bit through this passage, because I want to start out talking about the evidence of love.

What does love prove? Right, we're going to ascertain that, the evidence of love, and then we're going to look at the essence of love. What does it look like for us to love one another? It's like a two-point sermon.

You should be able to stick with me through this. I know many of us are tired. We've been away this weekend on our refresh retreat, which for some of us was less than refreshing, but still very enjoyable.

[7 : 13] Okay, so some of you are tired. I've got two points, and they're two absolutely imperative points for us to get. So let's take it up first. We're looking at the evidence of love.

Verse 14 says this, We know, you notice he says this about four times, I think it is in this passage, we know, we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another.

Whoever does not love abides in death. How do you know? How do you know if you're a Christian? That's what he's saying. John talks about becoming a Christian, about conversion in many different ways.

He talks about going from death to life. He talks about going from dark to light. He talks about being born again, both in 1 John and in John chapter 3, and I think it's John chapter 8, in his account of Jesus, in his gospel.

But here he's talking about conversion as being passing from death to life. This is why we do baptism. We go down into the water to signify death, and we come up out of the water to signify new life, resurrection.

[8 : 28] This is what happens when we're converted. We go from death, sin, Satan, evil, hell, to life. Life with God, peace with God, life eternal.

And he says, we know that we've gone from death to life. We know that we have been converted by this, because we love one another.

I wonder if that would be your first pick for the proof of life in this situation, for the proof of conversion. If I said, how do you know? What's the evidence?

What's the primary reason that we know that we have become Christians? Now, there would be other valid answers to that question. You know, if you can clearly articulate that Jesus died on the cross for your sins, rose to new life.

If you can clearly explain the hope that you have in heaven on account of Jesus' blood shed for you. There are these kinds of evidences of life.

[9 : 34] But John, in this letter, goes to this example. First and foremost, we know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another.

You need to add that to your list, if you have one, about how to tell if someone has genuine faith. Do they love their brothers and sisters?

Do they love their neighbours? We do this whenever someone comes for baptism. I sit down with them and we do three weeks, like three sessions. I've just been doing this with Rob and to ascertain whether Rob has true faith in Christ because it's really important that if he's going to be baptised and publicly confess his faith in Christ, he needs to be fair dinkum about it.

But I've never once asked anyone, do you have love for your neighbour? John says, a great proof of whether you're a Christian or not is this, do you have love for one another?

It's not that non-Christians are incapable of loving other people, it's not that at all, it's not really even talking about non-Christians or unbelievers or people of other faiths, it's looking at you square in the eyes, you who call yourself a Christian and it's posing the question to you, do you love one another?

[11 : 08] And if you can answer that question with a yes, I'm striving to love my neighbours, I'm striving to love my brothers and sisters, then that's a proof of life for you.

That's a proof of true spiritual life in Christ. So that's the evidence of love, that's what it proves, that we have love for one another, proves that we've been born of God, that we've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son.

Now we're going to look at a couple of examples. John gives us two examples about the essence of love and one of them is negative and one of them is positive.

The negative example as you heard in the reading, both readings really, is the example of Cain. He gives us Cain as an example of how we ought not live or a proof against what we might perceive as our conversion.

You know the story of Cain, Daryl read it for us earlier, but just to recap, so Cain and Abel were brothers, they were sons of Adam and Eve and Abel, his job was to tend the flocks and Cain's job was to till the fields and they both brought a sacrifice before God.

[12 : 28] God accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's sacrifice. We know from elsewhere in the Bible that really the basis of that acceptance and rejection was based on faith, that Abel had faith and love in his heart for God and Cain had nothing but evil in his heart towards God and his brother.

So Cain's response to seeing Abel's sacrifice being accepted is to be envious, is to be greedy for that affirmation for himself and so he turns on his brother and he kills him.

He's a murderer and God has a measure of grace and forgiveness for him but he is an example here to us of an evil sinful world that rather than loving their neighbours murders them.

And you might think to yourself this is a pretty obscure example. He's talking about how we should love one another and then he pulls out this murder example. Well, everyone's going to pass that test in this congregation I think. I'm not aware of any murderers.

I don't think any of you would even be capable of murdering someone would you? So he passed that test until you get to verse 15.

[13 : 49] Look down at verse 15 with me. He says this All who hate a brother or sister are murderers and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.

All who hate a brother or sister are murderers John was a really good listener I think. He remembers Jesus' sermon on the mount really well.

I think it's John I think it's Matthew chapter 5 verse 21 Jesus says almost a carbon copy of what John has just said.

He equates hating a brother or sister with murdering your brother and sister. I think really what he's getting at is he's saying at root if you hate someone you don't want them to be around.

You disregard their rights you wish that they'd never been born and so at the heart of it your hatred towards someone is akin to murder. Whether you go through with that action and actually remove them from the face of the earth or you just wish they weren't around in God's heart in God's mind it's all the same.

[15 : 04] If you hate a brother or sister you're a murderer.

You've probably said yourself and I've heard this before you know this guy at church he really got to my nerves I don't hate him but I don't like him I prefer not to spend time with him I don't want to be in a community group with him I don't want to be standing anywhere near him at supper in case we get in a conversation I just don't like that person John doesn't have any any room for that kind of argument for John you either love someone or you hate them and you're a murderer he's very black and white it's very helpful actually very stark and he got it from Jesus if you hate a brother or a sister you're a murderer John says that just as Cain is an example of an unloving greedy sinful world if we claim to be Christians if we claim to be living in the kingdom of light then we hate a brother or sister it gives evidence against us it shows that maybe we're living in the world as well maybe we have not experienced the forgiveness of sins maybe we harbour in our own hearts a measure of evil and malice towards others so that's a negative example hatred of brothers and sisters equated with murder then he gives us very quickly and it's kind of a relief to get there the positive example verse 16 and 17 we know love by this we know love by this that he that Jesus laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another that's how we know love outside of your knowledge of what

Jesus did on the cross in laying down his life for the sins of the world outside of that knowledge you don't know what love is you know about infatuation and flirtation you know about non-committal short-term relationships you know about failed love from father and mother and brother and sister you know a broken cursed love the way that you know love true love is this he laid down his life for us that's how we know love that's the kind of love John's talking about it's not a cheap imitation it's not a 14 year old infatuation it's not a 42 year old flirtation it's costly self sacrificial laying down your life kind of love and what's the response to that he says this is how you know love but it's not just a cognitive exercise this is how you know love and your response should be what to lay down your life for others to love those around you in that same self sacrificial way to put the needs of others before your own that's the kind of love that he's talking about we know love by this that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another how does

God's love abide in anyone how could somebody be called a Christian how could somebody claim the forgiveness of sins how could somebody claim that they'd gone from darkness to light how could anybody claim that God's love abides in them if they have the world's goods yet they see a brother or sister in need and refuse to help shame on us shame on me that we should claim the forgiveness of sins and that we should claim to no love we claim to no love because we've seen the greatest act of love in Jesus death for us he gave up everything he didn't put two bucks in the salvo tin he didn't even jump on the anchorage roster he gave up everything humbled himself took on the form of a slave and then died on the cross for the sins of the whole world how can we claim to know that and yet see a brother or sister in need and refuse to help for John that is completely incongruous the kind of lifestyle the kind of Christian lifestyle that we see a lot in the affluent west today where it's about knowing and knowing and knowing and knowing and never doing makes no sense to John and I would venture to say makes no sense to the new testament as a whole you notice here that John puts the emphasis on brother or sister how can you see a brother or sister in need and not help them and how can if you hate a brother or sister then it's akin to murder he does talk about love for neighbour and love for the world and so we shouldn't limit our love to those who are in this room or those who call themselves Christians but here his particular focus and it's because it really sharpens the point is that we must love our brothers and sisters this is really difficult for each one of us because while we are called to love in this way and while I believe that we are equipped to love in this way if we have the Holy Spirit within us our hearts are set against it our hearts are set against helping those in need if you've ever seen someone in need and you've felt a pang within you that I just want to ignore them just this once I want to keep things to myself just this once or twice or three times that's because your heart is set against helping others it's the meaning of the passage in the middle there verse 18 it's a difficult one to understand but let me just see if I can unpack it a little bit for you he says verse 18 little children let us love not in word or speech but in truth and action it's a great verse and by this we will know that we are from the truth and we'll reassure our hearts before him that's God whenever our hearts condemn us for God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything that's a difficult passage to understand let me try and explain it for you what John knows is that our hearts are set against doing the right thing even in our state of salvation even in our delivered state from darkness to light our hearts still work against us in this way you might find this message an incredibly hard one because your own heart works against

you when it comes to loving others but what he's saying here is this if you love others not just in speech but in truth and action that truth will reassure our hearts before god so when you come before god to be judged or when you come before god in prayer and confession doing those actions of love towards others being that loving person towards brother and sister helping those in need loving others in truth and action will reassure our hearts even though our hearts condemn us because they work against us even though our hearts condemn us because they turn us away from the needy our hearts will be reassured through our action of loving others god is greater than our hearts though our hearts be sinful though our hearts try to turn us away from doing good though our hearts try to tell us that we don't need to love everybody just the people that we get along with god is greater than our hearts god can overcome that insipid and instinctive hatred that you have for other people god is greater than our hearts and so we have no excuse how quickly do the excuses come to us when you hear a message like this when you read a passage like this maybe the excuse is that i'm a poor uni student i just don't have a lot of money to give away maybe the excuse is well i'm involved in other kinds of ministry there's only so much i can do or maybe the excuse is that other people give less than me so they should be giving more you can just name your own excuse and maybe your heart will tell it to you right now but god is greater than our hearts and god's word commands us to love one another and john says that a true proof of spiritual life is that we are loving one another not just in words and speech but in truth and action i love how he gives a practical example of helping the needy because our hearts are evil we can so quickly that they're like little attorneys our hearts are and they can come up with so many excuses why you shouldn't do this or that but he gives us a practical example of helping one another how can you see a brother or sister in need you with all the world's goods remember who he's talking to the by the way they weren't rich people they were christians in the first century they were lucky to have a roof over their heads and some food on the table so how much more we who have the whole world at our fingertips and the world's wealth at our fingertips living in the richest society that's ever lived with the most amount of opportunities how much more is the call going out to us that when we see a brother or sister in need and i would extend it to when we see anyone in need how can we call ourselves christians and yet refuse them i pray that god would be convicting our hearts as i speak but i believe that john's purpose in raising all of this stuff is actually to reassure us so just take a breath and think on on the reassurance that you can receive john is saying this a true

[27 : 03] and genuine proof of your spiritual life is this do you love one another do you love the people in this church i think most of you do i think all of you do you look around during the greeting time you look around after church during the supper time you look around during the week at the various things that we have on and it's clear that there's a great love for people in this church and so we should be reassured we should be encouraged our faith is genuine we love the truth we seek to live a godly life and we love one another so be reassured but i tell you there's nothing wrong with a little bit of conviction from the holy spirit that we could be doing a better job so what i want to do is just give us some time to sit in silence on our retreat away we had this time every day to sit in silence and some of us took up the offer but many of us go through our whole lives each day with information coming in from every angle with conversation going on in every situation and we never have any time to think and reflect and to ask the holy spirit who dwells within us to speak to us to convict us to encourage us i've got a final point that i want to finish on but i really want to give us this opportunity opportunity okay so we're going to have just a couple of minutes i want us to sit in silence and i want us to think on those three tests those that the test of proof of life proof of spiritual life do you love the truth are you seeking to live a godly life and tonight do you love one another do you love your brothers and sisters a couple of minutes then i'll wrap it up you you you you you you you you you you you

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[32 : 01] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, that this is a great evidence for us that we are children of God.

[33 : 29] Lord God, please enable us to believe in Jesus Christ and to love one another as he has commanded us.

Father, I pray that it wouldn't be enough for us just to know the truth and confess the truth. I pray that we would love the truth. Father, please give us opportunities day by day and please help us to respond to those opportunities, to love our brothers and sisters, to help those who are needy, to prove that we have spiritual life.

Father, please encourage our hearts tonight and reassure them as we love one another after the service in serving one another and encouraging one another in keeping one another accountable in looking for ways to help one another in practical ways.

Please reassure our hearts and encourage us that you are greater than our sinful hearts. God, for those of us here tonight who are struggling with assurance and not sure if we really are Christians, please encourage us as we love the truth, as we strive to live godly lives and as we love one another.

Amen. Lord, we thank you so much for all that you're doing in our hearts and in this congregation and all that you're going to do.

[35 : 21] For Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen.