

1 John 3:11-18

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, would you fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may truly hear your word, Learning to love Christ as we love one another, and to love one another because you first loved us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. We're picking up in our passage on the note that David and Bronwyn ended on last week when they were giving us parting words of pastoral encouragement. Each of them said you should trust the Lord. Each of them said cling firmly to Christ. Each of them said ready yourself to lend your ear to the next rector, whoever God has. And each of them ended with saying keep loving one another. Now it's one of the most familiar commands in the Bible. It's safe to say that if the Bible repeats it frequently, we probably need to be reminded of it frequently.

I remember when I was in high school, when the message about Jesus first gripped my heart, I wanted to learn everything I could about who this Jesus is. So I wish I had something like the catechism that's going on right now that Ben and others are leading.

[1 : 22] I would have ate that stuff up. But I didn't have it. So I was knocking on my youth pastor's door every single week, and he would allow me one hour once a week. That's all I got.

And I would come with all my questions, and I would try to pry back all the mysteries of who Jesus is with him. And we would talk about innumerable things, and then on the way out, he would say the same exact thing to me every time.

He'd say, Jordan, don't forget to love people. I can't remember a single word of what we talked about in any one of our conversations every single week for two straight years. But I remember what he said to me every time I left his doorway.

Jordan, remember to love people. Jordan, love people. Jordan, don't forget to love people. See, he understood something that I hadn't come to understand yet. In all my vigor to learn all I could about Jesus, and trust me, that's a really good desire that God gives us.

I had forgotten that there are some really important things I needed to learn from Jesus. And the older I get in the Christian life, the more convinced I am, and many of you have been a Christian much longer than me, so you get this.

[2 : 26] The more convinced I am that we need to be reminded of the simple truths over and over and over again until they finally sink into our hearts and our hearts come to rest in them.

I am not God. I need God. Christ died for me and loves me. Christ's spirit indwells me.

Christ wants me to love others, sacrificially and generously and practically. So this morning, John calls us back to a very simple truth.

He invites us to listen to the message that we have heard from the very beginning of our Christian faith. In verse 11, for this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

And John speaks this in the context of a massive affirmation that we are the children of God. It is the Father's great love for us that he has adopted us as his children.

[3 : 23] It is the Son's great love for us that he poured out his life unto death on the cross so that we might be reconciled to the Father. It is the Spirit's great love for us that he inhabits us and he indwells us and he makes his home in us, making us more and more like Jesus.

And what John wants us to know is that if we are truly children of God, and if the love of God truly dwells in us, then we will be people who love others.

It's pretty simple. Those who are loved will love. And they will learn to love by the love that they have received. In other words, they will learn to imitate the love that they have received themselves from God.

And this is a really important point, as before we jump into the main points of our passage. It's important to get this. John assumes here that love is something that needs to be learned. It's not instinctive.

It's not intuitive. It's not natural to us as human beings. At least not the sort of love that John's talking about here. It's something that we need to learn from someone.

[4 : 30] It's something that we need to grow in over time. And the way that we do that is by imitating others. It's not simply by reading something in a book, although reading Scripture is absolutely essential to a life of love.

But it's something that we imitate. It's something that we model our lives after by looking to other people. And so that's why John, in our passage, gives us two examples, two people.

One is a negative example, the example of Cain. He says, basically, don't be like Cain. He's the antithesis of love. And then he gives us a positive example. He gives us Christ, and he says, be like Christ.

Christ is the exemplar of love. Don't be like Cain. Be like Christ. Those are the two points of the passage. Pretty simple, not too complicated. Everybody following me so far?

All right. Thought I lost you already. That was rough. All right, let's get into the antithesis of love. Don't be like Cain. Let's pick this up in verse 14.

[5 : 31] Verse 14. We know that we have passed out of life into death. So notice, this is talking about our conversion. Coming to Christ.

Coming to Christ. Transferring from life to death. From death to life. Because we love the brothers and sisters in the family of God he's talking about. Whoever does not love abides in death.

So this is actually astonishingly direct. He's saying love is the sign of spiritual life in us. That we've been made alive in Christ and that God's love dwells in us by the Holy Spirit.

And lack of love is the sign of the Holy Spirit. Lack of love is the sign that we're still in spiritual death and need to be converted to Christ. And then he goes on in verse 15 to give us the extreme example of the lack of love.

Verse 15. Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life, salvation abiding in him or her.

[6 : 38] So generally speaking, the most unloving thing that you could do to somebody is kill them. It is the extreme opposite of love to murder.

And this is where the contrast between Cain and Christ is very stark. John is saying that Cain takes away and Christ gives. Cain takes away life from others and Christ gives his life for others.

And this is where things start to get a little uncomfortable. Because in John 15, John, I mean in verse 15, John seems to be claiming that the same dynamics that are at work in a person's heart when they come to the point of actually taking another person's life intentionally in murder, are the same sort of dynamics that are at work in us if we are harboring hate towards a brother or sister.

So that's why he goes to the example of Cain. Because Cain, if you're going to search all the scriptures, is the perfect example of how the dynamics of hate work themselves out in family life. Cain is the ultimate example of a sibling rivalry, of a family feud, is it not? And John highlights Cain because he wants to say to us, this is what family life should not look like in the church in the family of God.

[8 : 00] Let's take a closer look at what he highlights about Cain in verse 12. He says, We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Isn't that interesting? John wants to know why. It was underneath that murder. He says, Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Notice that. He could have just said his own deeds were evil and that would have been enough for us. Why did he murder him? Because Cain wasn't a good guy. But that's not where he stops. He says he murdered him not only because Cain wasn't a good guy, but because his brother Abel was righteous in the way that he related to the Lord and others.

And so there's this comparison drawn between the two, which makes us get this sense that underneath murder is not just hatred, but underneath hatred is some form of jealousy that Cain has toward his brother.

It's not just that Cain's deeds were evil. It's that his brother's deeds were seen as righteous. And he is jealous of his brother's righteousness.

[9 : 17] Now jealousy is a tricky word, I have to admit. It can be used positively or negatively. So a positive form of jealousy is often in the Bible how God is talked about as like a spouse who loves his people.

He's jealous for their love. He wants them to be completely faithful to him in their relationship to him. That's a positive thing. But jealousy can also be something that's negative. I want someone has something I want and I resent them for it.

And when that resentment goes unchecked, it can settle into hatred. And when hatred goes unchecked, it can eventually lead to murder. So what is John warning us about?

He's saying that evil shows up in the body of Christ when we get competitive. We are jealous about the righteousness of another person.

That person is smarter than me. I wish I was smarter than them. That person received the approval of others more than I received the approval of others.

[10 : 24] I wish I was approved in the way that they are. That person is gifted to minister to people in a way that I am absolutely not gifted to minister to others in.

And I wish I had those gifts instead of the ones the Lord has given me. There's a number of ways in which jealousy can work its way in the family of God.

And when jealousy finds its root, then we become consumed with what we don't have and wish we had from others, rather than what others need and what we could possibly give them out of love.

Does that make sense? The truth that I think he's getting at with the Cain example is you cannot love someone that you're jealous of or you hate.

Because jealousy wants to gain by taking from someone else, and love wants to bless by giving to somebody else. They're completely opposite directions. And Cain and Christ could not be more different in this regard, which leads us to our second point.

[11 : 26] Don't be like Cain, but be like Christ. He is the exemplar of love. And look at verse 16. This is the massive contrast.

By this, we actually know what true love is. That he, Christ, laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters.

This is very helpful for us. Now, upon first reading this, this can feel almost like an impossibly high standard, right? I don't know about you, but for some of us, this spurns us on, and for others of us, we feel defeated right from the beginning.

Like, I'm never going to be like this. But it's actually astonishing what John does. Right away, he gets right practical and personal. He gives us the example of Jesus, and then in verse 17, he just gets really down to earth about it.

He says, 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?

[12 : 35] And the implied answer for John is no. A heart cannot be closed to a fellow brother or sister in Christ and claim to be open to God at the same time. And one of the things that I want you to see about verses 16 and 17 is it creates this link between the cross of Jesus Christ, the way in which he met our great need at great cost to himself out of great love.

It connects the cross of Christ with all of our day-to-day interactions in verse 17. See, not many of us are going to do a bunch of great things and heroic things for the Lord.

There's somebody I know who once wrote a prayer, a prayer for those who feel they have not done great things for the Lord. But this is not what it's calling us to. What this is calling us to is doing a lot of little things to the people that God has put right in front of us on a day-to-day basis with great love.

It's lived out one person at a time. And the way we see this is notice how in verse 16 it goes from the plural to in verse 17 the singular. In verse 16 it's we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters, plural.

It's this general command, love everyone. But in verse 17, if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother or sister singular in need.

[13 : 59] And this is really significant. Because I think what it's saying to us is that this command to love is an all-encompassing command. But the way we actually live it out in faithfulness to Christ is one day at a time, one person at a time.

Who has the Lord put in front of me? And I love it. C.S. Lewis has a great quote about this. He says, It's easier to be enthusiastic about humanity with a capital H than it is to love the individual men and

women God has put in front of me.

And it goes on to say, Loving everybody in general may for me become an excuse for loving nobody in particular. I thought that was very apropos.

I may not be able to control all the things that are happening in my life. I may not be able to reform the church. I may not be able to change the world and solve all the ills of humanity.

But I can ask the Lord to help me love the person that's right in front of me. In this meeting. In this line. In this conversation. In this struggle.

[15 : 07] In this season. In this situation. I can ask the Lord to help me truly know and see what this other person's needs are. I can ask the Lord to give me wisdom and insight as to how maybe something the Lord has given me can actually be something that could bless this person in their situation of need.

I could ask the Lord to help me have discernment and sensitivity about how I offer help in a time of need. In such a way that honors that person and does not belittle them. And I can have the humility to give without needing to control the outcome or receive something in return.

And I can also have the ability to trust the Lord that maybe I don't have what this person needs in this moment. And the Lord will find another way to provide for their needs.

See what John is saying to us is that how you respond to the person in front of you in their time of need reveals something about you. You can't claim to have a closed heart to others yet an open heart to God.

And an open heart to others is one of the surest signs that your heart is open to the love of God. And that's the language that John uses here in verse 17.

[16 : 28] He talks about somebody having what somebody needs and seeing somebody's need and yet closing his heart against him. And in the Greek the word actually isn't heart. It's more the word for intestines or bowels.

It's like the deepest gut guttural level of the person. What's going on there? It's the same word that's used in say the parable of the prodigal son.

Where you know the prodigal son goes out and squanders all of his father's riches and blessings and goods. And he realizes that he's living a very sorry life. And so he comes to return to his father. And when the father sees him a long ways off in desperate need. It says that the father felt compassion for him and ran to meet his son and bless him in his need.

It's that same word for compassion that is the same word that is used here. And John is suggesting that if we really know the compassionate love of the father. If we really have seen Jesus Christ lay down his life for us.

[17 : 29] And we believe that that is true for us. And he has poured out his spirit to abide in us. Then we will have a heart that reflects the father's heart for us.

In the way that we relate to other people. We will love because he has first loved us. And so the question is this. As we conclude what does this look like?

How do we pursue the way of love? And I want to conclude with just a few suggestions. The first is this.

Deal with the hate in your heart. I read a book one time called The Sun Still Shines. An African American man was in prison on death row for a number of years.

And he hears a man next to him in the cell next to him crying out because his father had just died. And the father of the man in the cell next to him used to be the president of the Ku Klux Klan.

[18 : 33] And the man said at that moment I realized that I had to deal with my hate of his father.

In order to genuinely hear his cry. And know what he needed from me. As an act of love in that moment. You cannot love someone you hate or someone you resent or someone you're jealous of. And we must deal with the hate and resentment and jealousy in our hearts before the Lord. If you're a Christian this isn't an option. It's just called faith in Christ. We believe that there's no sin for which Christ did not die.

And we believe that there's nothing about our hearts that God doesn't already know. And we believe that if we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So one of the worst things that you can do that will hinder love for other people. Is to hide your hatred from God. In silence it will fester. And it will take over.

[19 : 36] And it will gain more and more power over you. And the only way forward is to acknowledge it where it is there. To speak it loudly and clearly and passionately to God. And to lay it down before him.

And allow him by the power of the cross to break its chains over you. And sometimes this takes a really long time. But it is something that God loves to do.

And the way that he does it brings us to the second application. Is not only deal with your hate before the Lord. But pay attention to the love of Christ for you. The only thing that has the power to break the hatred that infects our hearts.

Is the love of Christ. Nothing else has the power to do it. And our love for other people will only grow. As our sense of being loved by Christ grows as well.

He is the deep reservoir from which we draw in any relationship and circumstance. It is through being loved by him over and over again. That we are awakened to love others.

[20 : 41] And empowered to do so. And it is through fixing our eyes on the way that he interacts with people. And the way he loves them with such majesty. And in such tender humility. That we learn how to love other people.

I think this is the reason why the night before his death. Jesus washed his disciples feet first. And then afterwards he said. Now wash one another's feet as I have washed yours.

He knew they could only give what they first received. And had modeled from him. We love because God first loved us. So pay attention to the love of Christ for us. And finally please be practical.

Verse 18. Little children. Let us not love in word or talk. But in deed and truth. I think John is saying. Sometimes actions really do speak louder than words. Now don't get me wrong. Speaking the truth is an important form of love. That is increasingly uncommon in our world.

[21 : 39] We need to speak the truth as a form of love. But saying words is cheap. If it is not backed up by lived reality. Body. Bodily acts of mercy. Are an essential form of love.

In the family of God. It is this practical embodied quality of love. That I think John particularly has in mind here. And it is something that takes time. And effort. And intentionality.

And thoughtfulness. And patience. And perseverance. And courage. And presence. A good dose of grit. And much. Much. Prayer. It is incarnate.

Sacrificial love. Modeled after a savior's love. And it can take many forms. And honestly. I thought about spending about half an hour up here. Just listing all the ways. In which I see love in the congregation.

The ways in which people in this church. Have welcomed people in. And have tutored people. On the weekdays. And have visited people in the hospitals.

[22 : 36] On the weekends. Have walked with loved ones. Through difficulty. The number of ways in which love is expressed. In you St. John's. Is absolutely astonishing. And it can take many different forms.

And we need spirit led creativity. And wisdom. In how to do it. Some of us need our imaginations to be stirred. So I'm trying not to bore you too much. But just give you a few examples.

And then we'll be done. Just to stir your imagination. This isn't the only way it can look. But it can.

They're all from the church that I was at. In Southern California. There was one couple. In Southern California.

You know it's a car culture. You can't really go anywhere. Unless you have a car. And so a lot of homeless people. Will kind of sit on the meridian.

Between the. In the streets. Near the stop signs. And they'll hold up signs for need. And so there was a couple in the church. That I was serving. That would always create two. They would always have two care packages.

[23 : 33] In the back of their car at all times. Where they'd have a fresh change of clothes. And they would have a \$50 grocery card in there. And whenever they saw someone in need. They had something ready to go.

There was another pastor that I knew. That he set up a separate bank account. It wasn't for his monthly tithes to the church. Or for long-term missionary support.

But it was for meeting occasional needs. As they came up. He knew he didn't have enough cash flow. At any given moment. Just to be like. Here you go. I can help your need. So what he did. Is he tucked away \$50 a week.

So that it could build a little nest egg. And he would pray to the Lord. Lord. If there are any needs in the congregation. That you know I can meet. Would you please bring those opportunities. To my attention.

There was a woman that I knew. That went through a season in life. Where she had a lot more time. Than she had money. She just recently. Retired and finished her job.

[24 : 31] She didn't have a lot of change. To spare. But what she did have. Is she had three mornings. Every single week. Free. She had Monday. Wednesday. And Friday morning. And what she did notice.

Is that in the church. That she was in. There was a great need. For mentorship. Amongst the young adults. Especially the women. And young moms. And so she decided. Every Monday. Wednesday. And Friday. I'm going to walk. Talk and pray. With some young woman. From the church. I'm going to give them. The gift. Of presence. And prayer. See there's a whole number of ways.

In which this takes shape. In the church. There's a whole number of ways. In which it can. And it doesn't ride. On any one of our shoulders. Because God has given us. This command. To do it. Together. But by his power.

We can know. That the love of God. Abides in us. And when the love of God. Abides in us. Then we love one another. Using everything God has given us. For the good of each other.

[25 : 30] And as Jesus taught us. This is how the world will know. That we are his disciples. It's by our love. For one another. So brothers and sisters. Keep up the good work.

God's at work in you. And he's going to continue. To grow you. And increase you. In faith and love. As you look to the Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father. And the Son. And the Holy Spirit. Amen.