

Love One Another

1 John Series

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Beginning in verse 4.

4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. 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.

And the passage we're considering this morning, verse 11,

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 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. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

At the beginning of the epistle, John tells us that God is light, that that was the message that Jesus had when he came into this world, God is light. John also records another "being" statement regarding God later on in chapter 4 and that is God is love. There are only a few of these statements in Scripture defining God as being something, God is light is one of them, God is a consuming fire is another one that we find in the book of Hebrews, and then in chapter 4, God is love.

This statement is very important because it gives us an understanding of the very nature of God and that those who belong to him will show that nature, they will reflect that nature in one way or another. Just as those who know God reflect the fact that God is light and the fact they live according to the light and they walk in the light, so those who know the God who is love will reflect that love, the love of God in the way they live and the way they act, and one of the central ways that they reflect the love of God is in love for one another and this love for one another is a particular love. There's a general love that human beings and Christians are to have for all mankind but there is a special love that Christians are to have for other Christians and that is what John means and what Jesus meant when he first gave that command "that you love one another as I have loved you." So we're going to consider the fact of this command to love one another and how it is central and how it is essential in the lives of Christians. We're going to consider three subjects or three words this morning, three topics, as we think about this issue.

The first is love, just plain love. John says that this is the message that these Christians have heard from the beginning, that they are to love one another. It began with Jesus speaking to his disciples in that last night, the night which he was betrayed. He tells them that they are to love one another, it's a new commandment that he gives to them, to love one another as he has loved them. It's a special love, a gracious love, a love that goes beyond a general love for mankind.

The law of God reveals the love of God. Love is the fulfillment of the law. The Bible is very clear about that. The New Testament reiterates that very profoundly for us, that if we love God and love our neighbor, it will be seen in keeping God's commands towards them. Loving our neighbor is an outworking of the Christian's love for God and so is loving one's enemy is the outworking of a Christian's love for God. It is part of the Gospel.

The application of love in these different ways are not merely just that, they're not merely applications of the Gospel. The goal of the Gospel, the end of the Gospel, at least in some part, is love which means if we understand the Gospel truly, it's not that we take the Gospel and then apply it in this way that we love one another or love other people, we realize that the purpose of the Gospel is to show us God's love and transform us that we love God and love others. The goal, the outworking of the Gospel in our lives is seen in love and love is very important in 1 John. Love is one of those central things that John focuses on over and over in this epistle.

It's so easy for us to read this epistle and feel like, "John, you are being very redundant. You just said this. You just said this about loving one another in the previous chapter. You made that very clear in chapter 2, you made it very clear in chapter 2 about how we are to walk as he walked and that means we're to love one another and so forth, and then you go on in chapter 4 and you tell us to love one another again, what you just told us in chapter 3, and John, what's the point?" The point is, is that this is the point of being a Christian; is that in knowing the God who is love, we love God's people.

So it means we need to ask the question: what is love? Now it is a scary thing to ask that question and have people answer it, there are all kinds of things that people will say, but since I'm in charge this morning, I'm going to define it in the right way, not because it's my way, but define it in the biblical way. One of the first things that we as contemporary Christians in our day and age where we live need to understand, is that love is not merely an emotion. Love is not merely an emotion. In fact, I would say that love in its definition is not an emotion. Love is emotional, there are emotions involved in love, but love first and foremost is not an emotion. It is more than that. In fact, you look at the definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13, and you will be surprised, perhaps not, but you will likely be surprised that there is not one mention of emotions in that definition of love.

Love is not "a good feeling." That's not what Paul says. Paul says love is patient, which is an action. He says love is kind, which is actions. He says love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not arrogant or rude, it does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful, or as another translation, it does not take into account a wrong suffered, it means it's forgiven. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, love rejoices in the truth. Any mention of emotions there? Certainly not in terms of "feel good, warm and fuzzy feelings." There's no mention of that.

One of the primary things we see about love in defining it in 1 Corinthians 13 is that love is not about me. Love is not self-seeking. Love is not about how I feel, and love does not have myself as the goal. Love is other-centered. Other-centered in the sense of it is about the other person; it is about how we treat the other person; how we act toward the other person; how we deal with our feelings and our thoughts and our actions in view of the other person.

Love is an action primarily. It is a choice. This is we're told that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that in love he predestined us. The act of God's love was in choosing to love. Love is about dedication, about choosing to dedicate one's self to the good of another person. 1 Corinthians 13:7-8 shows that, "Love bears all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, it endures all things. Love never ends." It's not talking about the emotion, it's talking about the commitment that one makes towards another person, to bear all things with him, to believe all things in view of them in terms of believe for their good, hoping all things towards that person, enduring all things with that person. Committed love, active love never fails.

So if we're going to define love, we need to understand that it is, it needs to be defined in some way like this: it is a committed affection, notice how affection, the affections are involved, it is a committed affection that leads to right action. Love is a committed affection that leads to right actions. It shows itself in word and in deed. It commits to the good of others, the good of others in how Scripture defines the good of others, and the reason is because we care about them.

A believer will love his or her fellow believers. Verse 14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life," we have been born again, we know this "because we love the brethren," we love the brothers and sisters, our fellow believers. It is the evidence that we

are born again. Do you see how John makes that so simple? Remember what I told you at the beginning as we began with 1 John? 1 John is a book first and foremost about assurance. "I write these things so that you may know that you have eternal life." And he's expanding on that idea. How can we know that we are born again? How can we know that we are not children of Satan any longer? How can we know that we're children of God? It's because the evidence of God's love is in us because we love one another. That's the evidence.

Love for the brethren is the fruit of belonging to God and as Christians, how can we not love one another? Think about it. It is really inevitable that Christians will love one another. They're of the same family, not merely in terms of, you know, you go to a lot of churches and this is kind of one of them, where half the church is related to one another in some way. Maybe that's hyperbole but you know what I'm saying. There is a sense in which there is a familial relationship, an earthly familial relationship where people are related and they love each other, but it goes beyond that, doesn't it? There's a part of the same family in a spiritual sense. We belong to one heavenly Father. We cannot help, in one sense, to love the siblings that we have because our Father loves them.

We have the same heavenly Father. We have the same purpose. We have the same purpose in living and that is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, and how can we not love those who have that same purpose, to know God and to love him and to live for him? We're in this together. There's going to be affections. There's going to be appreciation and commitment to the good of one another in some way. We have the same future, the same future here on earth together in terms of being in a local church, and then a same future with the universal church in glory forever, living with one another in perfect union and perfect harmony. We're moving towards that day when we will see Jesus Christ and he will make all things right, and we will serve him with one accord and sing to him with one voice, and be perfectly united to him and to one another in harmony forever. That is our future. We have the same Master, the same Savior, and the same Spirit of God dwells in each one of us. There is an inevitability that believers, true believers, they will love their brothers and sisters in Christ. These are the things that knit our hearts together, they draw us to one another.

So that's why we pray for one another. You know how you love someone? One of the main ways is seen in the fact that you pray for them. Years ago, I was preaching in terms of a husband and a wife and I said, "Husbands, the way we show that we love our wives the most first and foremost is to pray for them." That is the number one thing that we can do, is to pray for them because you know what Jesus Christ does right now for his bride constantly? Do you know what he's doing? He's praying for her. He ever lives to make intercession for his church.

The way we show love is praying for one another and that's seen in our congregation praying for one another. We love one another, we're concerned, we call. Isn't it great to get a call from somebody, not always, but a call from somebody that they're thinking about you and concerned? It does your heart well, doesn't it? It does your heart well to

think about somebody in this world is thinking about you when you are in a poor estate. It's because they love you.

We give to one another. We give of time. We give of assets. We serve one another. We empathize and sympathize with one another. We yearn for one another. All of these things are outworkings of love because we are part of the same family.

There's a reason why the church loves that song, that hymn, "Blessed be the tie that binds." It's one of those hymns that whenever I've heard it sung in different congregations over the years, it's sung with gusto, with emotion. There are people who have been in these churches for decades and they look at one another and they understand this love that that song is speaking of.

And so, do you love the brethren? Are you concerned for them? Are you committed to their good? This is the evidence that you are born of God.

So that's the first thing, love. A second subject: hate. Hate is really the opposite of love. It is not an affection that is committed to the good of others in any way. It's a desire that seeks the harm of others or it's a desire that doesn't seek to benefit someone at all. It can be seen in outward actions to harm, or could simply be seen in the fact of not to benefit them at all and write them off completely. It is the absence of love.

If we look at verse 17, not a part of our passage this morning but as the passage goes on, verse 17 we're showed this, John says, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" John is saying, putting this principle into practice, how can somebody have God in their soul and yet not help their brother or sister when they're in need? It's not possible. It's not possible for somebody to neglect our brothers and sisters in need and be born again.

Well, John gives us an illustration to understand what he's talking about here, an illustration of the true nature of hate and to show us that all hatred is murder in embryonic form. Remember the teaching of Jesus? If you hate your brother in your heart, what have you already done? You've murdered them. You've broken the commandment, "You shall not kill." So John is building on that truth, that principle that Jesus laid down in the Sermon on the Mount for us, and he gives us that illustration here with Cain. He says, "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother." Genesis 4 records this interaction between Cain and Abel. Cain was so filled with jealousy and rage against his brother that he rose up and struck down his brother in the field. The blood of Abel cried out that day to God. His innocent blood. And what a sad day that was, the first act of murder, outward act of murder that we have in the Scriptures, and Cain is forever associated with murder.

John tells us several things about Cain here. He tells us that Cain belonged to the evil one. Why did Cain do this? Because he didn't belong to God. He was a child of the devil. Abel was of God and the righteous acts of Abel in Genesis 4 reveal the fruit of a heart that was born again. But not Cain. Cain murdered his brother, John tells us, and the word

here for "murder" is a brutal term. It is a term that means "to butcher or to slaughter," the idea of killing someone by violent methods. You can see the wrathfulness and the rage in this word in thinking about how Cain slaughtered his own flesh and blood. And why did he do it? Because he hated the righteous actions of his brother.

There is enmity that exists between Satan and God and that enmity spills over very profoundly into the world in which we live where the evil one raging against the kingdom of God, and so are his children raging against God's children, there's enmity between the devil's children and God's children and that will continue until the end, and that's why verse 13 tells us, "Do not be surprised that the world hates you." Light offends. The light of God dwelling in the hearts of his people offends. It offends the children of the devil and it will continue to do so, and we look around the world and look around the history of the world and we see Christians persecuted by the world because they are children of God. There is no righteous reason why these Christians have been torn apart and sawn in two. The reason is, is because their deeds are righteous because they are born of God, and so we are to expect in this world that Christians who are born of God will be hated and will be attacked because ultimately it is about whose family you are a part of.

Now we are to expect this from the world, but what about in the church? What about in the visible church? John addresses this because we know, or we need to know, that the visible church contains those who are of God and who are of the devil. Verses 14 and 15, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death," verse 15, "whoever hates his brother." It's not talking about earthy familial relationship, whoever hates his brother in the church, "is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Someone who confesses to be a Christian but does not love, is not a Christian. Someone who confesses to be a Christian but who hates his brother in the local church, or hates his brother on the other side of the world who is a part of the church of Christ, is a murderer. He is of the devil.

In John 8, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees of his day, the scribes, these are the religious men of the church, the faithful, the faithful of the community, within Jerusalem they were upheld and esteemed, people knew their theology, it was these people, if people were obedient to law, it was these people, they knew the law, they understood the law, they knew the law that went beyond the law, the rabbinic law, if anybody was religious, it was these men and Jesus says to them, "Your are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desire of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning."

Whoever hates his brother in the church, is not born of God and we need to be mindful of our hearts in this matter. We do not need to underestimate the subtle nature of this sin and the potential that it has of taking hold of your heart. It can begin with a simple offense that you take, or it can begin with an offense that you gave and you made amends for it as best you could, yet that person rejected it. It can begin in any form or fashion. It can begin at the root of jealousy, of bitterness. It can be the outcome of simply the fact you don't like someone who's different than you. It is a subtle thing but it can take hold of

your heart and you can justify it in ways that seems righteous in your eyes but it is still not righteous.

We need to be very mindful of this and we need to know that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness for every sin of hatred that enters into our hearts, and when sin comes, when the sin of hatred comes, we need to go to Jesus. We need to be cleansed of it. We need to repent of it and we need to ask him to help us because in him, and in him alone, there is help to love one another.

That leads me to my third subject. We saw love, hate, and thirdly, help. John speaks in absolute terms. He speaks in terms of light, darkness, of sinning, of not sinning, unrighteousness, righteousness. He speaks so starkly, black and white terms that it can overwhelm us or simply the common reader, but he does this for a reason. He has an intention here. He wants to lay down clear concepts for us, but what he is not intending to do as he also makes clear in this book, is he is not speaking about sinless perfection. He is not saying that as Christians we will never struggle with frustration or hatred or anger. He's not saying that we will constantly and always be pure or clean in terms of this issue, but what he is talking about is seeking to live out a life as the children of God; that we will, if we are born again, we will seek to live in ways that show the love of God.

And as we think about these things as Christians, when we read John's absolute terms, one of the strongest things that come to our minds is that we know this battle, don't we? We know this battle. We know the battle of loving other Christians and yet struggling against the anger and the hatred that can so easily arise. We know this battle. We know what it's like. We can say to ourselves, we know, "I do love the brethren but sin so easily creeps in at times. I want to love them more. I don't want to have this anger towards my brother or sister in Christ. I don't want to have these feelings. I know they're wrong." We are very conscious of this battle. We ask the question, "How can I love the brethren more? How can I do this?" We think through ways, too, we reason to ourselves and we'll say, "You know, if people were normal, it would be easier to love them." And we prove the point, don't we, ourselves? Did you get that? We prove the point ourselves. If we were normal, it would be easier to love and to be loved.

It's not about being normal, though, it's not about being perfect, it's not about getting everything right, it's about knowing the Savior who is perfect and knowing his perfect love for us, and the only possible way to truly love one another is by knowing the love of Christ for you. That is the right and only way and unless we grasp this, we will not be able to fight this battle. Look at verse 16. John shows us this, "By this we know love." How do I love my brethren? How do I love my brothers and sisters in Christ? How do I fight this battle against the anger and the frustration and the natural sinful tendency in my heart to despise those who are just not me? How do I deal with this? "By this," John says, "we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

How do we love one another? By knowing the love of Christ. It's when you see very clearly that you are not lovable, that you are not worthy of the love of God. You've not

done anything to merit or to earn or to warrant the love that God has lavished on you, and if you think you are, you have been listening to the false philosophies of our world. There is no one righteous. There is no one who is good. Christ's love is love for those who are not lovable, and when you realize that love for you that he shows you on Calvary and he continues to love you with, that is what helps you to love other people who are not lovable as well. That's the only thing that will help you because if you just want to strengthen yourself and say, "I'm just gonna push through it and love these people no matter what," good luck with that. But when you look at your own heart and you see that Christ loves you anyway, though you sin against him, though you know better but you keep doing things to offend him every day, that his love remains, that will capture your heart to love people just like you because Christ loves them as well. And brethren, we are God's children and that means that Christ loves us, and that means as you look at your brothers and sisters in Christ in this building, you're looking at someone who is loved by the one who loves your soul, and if your Savior whom you love because he loves you, loves them, then you are able to love them as well. And so let us love one another.

It comes down to this: the knowledge of God means knowing the God who is love, and if we know him through his Son, that love will transform us, it will change us, and we will love one another and we will keep on loving one another, and when we fail to love one another, we'll repent and we'll look at the love of Christ and we'll keep going, and we'll try to love, and we'll keep pressing on, finding strength in him to do so. This is the outworking of the Gospel and if you look at your life and you see love for the brethren in any way, as imperfect as it may be, that love of the brethren is a supernatural act of God and you can be assured that the love of Christ truly does dwell in you.

Let us pray.

Father, we give you thanks for your word. We ask that as we come to your Table in a few moments, that the love of Christ would dwell richly within us, that we would be able together with all the saints to grasp what is the length, breadth, width and height and depth of the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge; that we would see that this love that was displayed at Calvary so wonderfully is the love that binds us to one another, and it is the love that shows our union to God. Help us to think deep and lofty thoughts and where your word teaches us of what it means to be your children. In Jesus' name. Amen.