

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

The Necessity of Holy Loving #2

1 John 3:14-18

GraceLife: 12/5/2010

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By way of introduction I guess, it should be said from the outset as we prepare our hearts for the message from God's word this morning, you simply cannot exhaust the greatness of Jesus Christ and you cannot exhaust any particular attribute or action of His as you plumb the depths of it, and scripture often does it. It will focus on a particular aspect of the death of Christ or a particular aspect of the attribute of Christ and just begin to unfold the meaning that it has, both in terms of our understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Him and also for what it means for our own individual lives. Philippians 2 is a passage like that where it focuses on the humility of Christ in the incarnation and then just unfolds a number of implications that that has for us as believers in terms of how we view ourselves and interact with one another.

Well, the passage that we come to here this morning is a passage that is exactly like that and in a simple short statement makes a statement about Christ and then unfolds the depth of meaning that it has for us and our relationships among the body of Christ and in a very searching and, for some of us encouraging while for some of us in a very convicting way.

1 John chapter 3 is where we are at and I invite you to turn there with those thoughts in mind. This is a Christological passage, it is a passage that its focus is based on the love of Christ and His sacrifice of His own life on our behalf to be a substitute for our sins.

Just by way of reminder of very familiar things, the apostle John wrote this book in part so that we would know that we have eternal life. Christians, contrary to what Catholics and others would do to the torture of your soul, Christians are not supposed to be in doubt about their salvation. John said that he wrote so that we know that we have eternal life. And what he does is that he writes to show us the marks of a true Christian so that we could see the standard, we could see the pattern and as we see that our lives approximate that kind of work of God in our lives, we would have greater assurance of the reality of our salvation, greater assurance that we have passed out of death and in to life, that we have escaped the eternal condemnation that our sins deserve and we have been delivered by God in to the forgiveness of sin and in to the assurance of eternal life, the hope of heaven when we die. Those are the reasons that he writes and the matter of assurance is of incalculably great consequence.

What could be more important than knowing that when you cross the river as it were from life in to physical death, that heaven awaits you on the other side not the judgment of hell and eternal damnation. Nothing could be more important than that when you get to the end of life, that is the only thing that matters is to have an assurance of salvation and that you would know that you are

a true possessor of eternal life. Part of the way that we know that is to understand what the marks of Christians are and to be able to see those and to examine ourselves to see whether these things are true in our own lives.

One mark among others that John mentions is that he talks about the moral test of obedience to the law of God and he talks about the doctrinal test of believing in the true Christ. The entrance point of knowing that you have eternal life is knowing that you believe in Jesus Christ and that you are trusting in Him alone to be your righteousness before God, that you have no righteousness of your own, but you are trusting in Christ alone and His death and resurrection as the satisfaction of the demands of the law of God upon you, that your righteousness is outside of you and belongs to Christ and has been given to you as a gift—that is the starting point.

If that is true in your life, if you have repented of sin and you have put your faith in Christ, you are going to do certain things that necessarily come forth out of your life. And one of the things that comes out of your life naturally is the reality of Christian love, the reality of love in the life of the true believer.

We introduced this last time, the idea that true Christians will love other Christians because they share a common life together and we have a natural affinity for other believers because we have the same Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts and so there is a natural attraction like magnets to one another to share in life together, to serve one another, to love one another. That is a necessary result of true salvation and the absence of it is the sign that someone has never been converted no matter what they may say about theology or other matters of biblical import.

We looked at this passage last time, I am going to finish it here this morning I think, we will see how it goes. 1 John 3:11-18, let me read the passage to set it in your mind this morning—beginning in verse 11, John says:

This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised brethren if the world hates you.

(Verse 14 is where we will pick up the exposition this morning)

We know that we have passed out of death in to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abide in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

At the beginning of this passage in verses 11-13 that we looked at last time, John had just told his readers don't be surprised if the world hates you, if those that do not know Christ manifest

hostility and persecution against you. He says this has been the way it was from the beginning of time, the wicked have hated the righteous as shown by Cain's murder of Abel. There was more than a sibling rivalry going on when Cain murdered Abel. There was a manifestation of the intrinsic hatred that wicked people have toward the righteous, this is a thread that goes back to the beginning of time, this is part of what is woven in to the fabric of our sin-fallen and sin-cursed world—the wicked hates the righteous.

And John expounds that and explains that so that we are not surprised, we are not thrown off our spiritual balance when opposition comes to us because of our love for Christ. He says don't be surprised by that in verse 13, this is to be an expected part of your existence as a Christian. And so it need not discourage you, it need not detain you, you can continue on and be faithful to Christ, confident of His hand of blessing upon you. Because just as Cain killed Abel, just as the world hated Christ and crucified Him, so it will be for those who are His disciples. We expect this, this is a natural part of it, we are glad to bear that as an incidental consequence of knowing Christ, of having our sins forgiven and having the great, immense, immeasurable treasure that belongs to us of walking in fellowship with Him, ultimately culminating in sharing eternal life with Him throughout the halls of heaven.

Why would we pain ourselves and worry about a little persecution from the world in this time? The worst they can do is kill us and that's the best they can do because that would introduce us immediately in to heaven. We are not intimidated by that, we are not afraid of that, we are not hindered by that, we view the opposition of the world simply as the wind that comes against us that gets under our wings and lifts us even higher in our pursuit of Christ.

So, with that introduction to its topic in verses 11-13, he pivots, he turns the corner and he wants to go from the negative description of the world's hatred toward believers to a positive exposition of Christian love and what that means in our lives and what that looks like. And so there are two main points that I want to structure today's message around, first point is what Christian love proves and secondly what Christian love does—I can't make it much simpler than that, what love proves and what love does.

1. What Love Proves

What does love prove? What does the manifestation of Christian love prove? As we go on in the passage beginning in verse 14, what John does is he is contrasting the attitude of the world toward Christians with the attitude that true Christians have toward one another and the behavior and the actions that true Christians have toward one another. And his point is this that that kind of Christian love within the body of Christ is proof that you have eternal life. This is how you know that you passed from death in to life, you passed from condemnation to forgiveness. One of the manifestations of that is that you have a natural outflowing of love in your heart and in your life toward people of like precious faith. And he goes on and says that the absence of that kind of love shows that you do not have eternal life. Look at verses 14-15, we will look at it more closely now, he says:

We know that we have passed out of death in to life...

That's the most important question in the world. Are you living in eternal death? Is the condemnation of God still upon you or you passed out of that stage in to forgiveness and in to eternal life? That is one aspect that the several tests that John lays down in this letter so that you could evaluate yourself, so you could examine yourself, in verse 14 he says:

We know that we have passed out of death in to life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (black and white contrast)

(verse 15) everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

The "we" here as he starts out in verse 14 "we know" is a short contrast, it is very emphatic in the original language, it is a short contrast. Verse 13 "the world hates us" don't be surprised by that. But now, sharp contrast, though the world is like that, we are different, we have a different approach, they hate us, but we love one another.

We understand that the world is going to be opposed to us, the world is going to hate us. And one of the reasons that Christian love within the body of Christ is so important is that we know that we have to love one another within the context of the body of Christ because outside it we are not going to find it. And so we have a mutual commitment and a mutual obligation to one another, a mutual privilege with one another to love each other and that the body of Christ would be a place where we can find assurance and comfort in our relationships knowing that that is not going to be extended to us by world that hates us and is opposed to us. And so love for Christians is a necessary response to the saving mercy of God.

Throughout this passage as he is talking about loving one another, he is talking about an ongoing habitual pattern of life kind of love, not a momentary impulsive affection that wells up and endures a moment of influence, but this is a settled pattern of life that he is describing, it is an ongoing practice of love. When he says here that "...we know that we have passed out of death in to life..." there at the beginning of verse 14, he is describing something that is a completed action that has ongoing continuing results through the present time. Whereas before, you had abided in eternal death, where as before, you were in darkness, separated from God by your sins, under His judgment and knew nothing about the glory of Christ and you did not love Him, you did not serve Him, you did not obey Him, from that position of darkness, true Christians have passed out of that in to a different realm. Where death reigned now life reigns.

To better see what this phrase means, turn back to the gospel of John for just a moment, John 5:24. In 1 John 3:14 he is giving a shorthand reference of passing out of death in to life. I want you to see that he is talking about matters of eternal consequence when he says that and to see more specifically that he is talking about having passed out of condemnation because he is echoing the words of Jesus in John 5:24 where Jesus said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and does not come in to judgment, but has passed out of death in to life.

Based on that verse and what John is saying in chapter 3, passing from death in to life means that you have escaped the condemnation of God upon your sins by believing in Jesus Christ. You are no longer concerned about, you are no longer subject to the judgment of God because that was the purpose of the death of Christ on behalf of those who believe in Him, that He bore the judgment that our sins deserved in His own body on the cross, and that when we believe in Him, when we repent and put our faith in Him, that penalty is paid on your behalf and forgiveness is extended where once judgment and condemnation were the attitude of God toward you. Forgiveness now reigns where judgment was once had been in place. And what John is saying is the way that you can know that greater spiritual reality, that unseen spiritual reality is true in your own heart is to see what comes out of your life toward other believers who also share that same kind of faith, who also have that common life—that's what he is saying. Your attitude toward the body of Christ is evidence, important evidence of the reality of whether you truly have been forgiven or not.

Now, just to be clear here, as he is speaking, he is not saying that loving the brethren is what causes us to receive eternal life, instead is the effect of having eternal life. We don't start loving in order to get eternal life, in order to merit eternal life. No, you come as a beggar before the throne of Christ and lay your life down before Him and ask Him to forgive you and save you. And as He gives you new life in that process, then that new life manifests itself out in loving the brethren among other things. God gives you a new heart, He puts His Holy Spirit within you and that new heart has a particular attitude toward the people who also belong to God through faith in Christ.

So, keeping the context in mind here, since the world naturally resents Christians, opposes them, mocks them, ignores them, hates them, you can know that a spiritual change has taken place in your life when you have separated yourself from that kind of attitude and you find yourself naturally loving other Christians. You want to serve them, you want to minister to them, you want to be involved in their lives because this love that Christ pours out within our hearts simply can't be contained within the walls of our own private life. We are drawn to fellowship and to love one another of like precious faith.

The apostle Paul alludes to this, turn over to 2 Corinthians 8, I want you to see an example of this. How can you know when the grace of God has been manifested in someone's life? One of the ways that you see it is the grace of God is manifested when they start to reach out in ministry to other believers. 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul says:

Now brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churchs of Macedonia.

How can we see that grace manifested Paul? He says in verse 2:

In a great ordeal of affliction, their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of

participation in the support of the saints. And this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

The grace of God was being manifested in those churches. The reality of their salvation was being shown forth by the liberality and the generosity that they were having toward other believers—that is the idea.

With that in mind, go back to 1 John 3:14. He says this is how you can know that you have received eternal life because you love the brethren. And if you do not love the brethren in this way, you are abiding in death. And so the idea here is that if you do not openly love other Christians and the pattern of your life is isolation or hostility toward believers or indifference to the believers around you, that is an indication that you should take very seriously that you are abiding still in death despite what you may have otherwise thought about the reality of your salvation. People abide in death even when they are not overtly hostile to Christians. Stated differently, John is describing something that is a positive aspect, an actual thing that happens in lives of Christians toward others, you simply can't be natural here. If you are natural and indifferent to Christians, you do not have the kind of love that he is describing. Love requires an active response. An indifferent heart is a sign of death as much as is a hateful heart because love is active as he is going to go on and show here in the remainder of the passage. But for sure, ongoing hostility is a sure sign of an unconverted heart. Look at verse 15, he says:

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him

Not just the murder is a sign of lacking eternal life. The hard attitude of hatred and hostility is as well. This verse reminds us that the law of God rules our hearts not just our actions. The Bible does not give us the freedom to approach Christianity and the law of God in simply an external fashion and ask how it affects our behavior. It goes straight to our heart attitudes and the Lord Jesus Himself went out of His way to emphasize that the heart attitude incurs as much guilt as the external action does. Listen to this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21, Jesus said:

You have heard that the ancients were told "You shall not commit murder and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court."

The external action. But He goes on to say and He draws out the application to the heart when He says in verse 22:

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court. And whoever says to his brother "you good for nothing" shall be guilty before the Supreme Court. And whoever says "you fool" shall be guilty enough to go in to the fiery hell.

Forget the idea that murder is simply shedding blood by your hand. Jesus goes and says, what about your anger and hostility and hatred and bitter spiteful words toward those around you. He

says you want to see the heart of a murderer, there it is—that's convicting. And lest you think that is being overly strict or overly scrupulous, lest you think that what goes on in my heart is less important than what I do, understand this, the unbroken connection between hatred and murder, hatred is the passion that leads to murder. Hatred is the motivating factor behind murder. Hatred and greed and jealousy and all of those wicked attitudes, you don't murder someone that you love, it would seem to go without saying, you don't shed their blood in cold-hearted murder. And so hatred is the passion that leads to murder and what Jesus is saying and what John is saying in 1 John chapter 3 is the fact that others can't see what is going on in your heart doesn't diminish the gravity of your sin in the eyes of God.

Your life attitudes are barometer of your spiritual health and if there were not the passion of hatred motivating, murder would not be a problem. The truth of the matter is that there would be a whole lot more murder going on based on the hatred that is in people's heart if it were not for the external constraint against it, the fear of punishment, the fear of what might happen. But if hatred were unleashed to its logical conclusion, there would be murder everywhere because what is hatred except for the fact that I wish you weren't here. And what is murder except for saying "I wish you weren't here and I'm going to make that happen." It is still motivated by the same heart concern, the same heart passion, the same heart sin and that is why the Bible connects the two as it does.

And so your life attitudes are a barometer of your spiritual health. And if you are here today as a professing Christian with a lot of bitterness and anger toward someone that you have been justifying, you need to take that really seriously as a drop-dead priority to deal with and get resolved before the Lord. You need to repent of that bitterness because that kind of hatred, that kind of bitterness, that kind of vitriol is something that is at absolute odds with being a true believer, it is not something that you can tolerate and nurse as though it didn't really matter because it is just within your heart, it does matter.

Having said that, John here is talking about the virtue of Christian love:

We know that we passed out of death in to life because we love the brethren.

It would be most fitting for me at this point to say that many of you should be encouraged by this passage because your lives are a blessing to the saints. Your kindness, your positive acts of goodness toward people within the body of Christ are evidence of the reality of your salvation. John writes here not to frighten us who truly belong to Christ in to a lack of assurance. He is writing to affirm us in our salvation that we would walk with even greater confidence and joy and holiness. So all I can do is lay out the principles and let you sort out how they properly apply in your own life. Many of you should be encouraged, some of you need to examine yourselves once again to see whether you are truly in the faith. Because this issue of love is the defining test of what it means to be a true Christian—that's what love proves, love for the saints proves that you have eternal life.

Now the question is, what does that love look like? We said it was not a momentary impulse of affection. What does love look like? John gets theological and practical at the same time as we

move in to our second point. We have looked at what love proves; it proves that you have eternal life.

2. What Love Does

Secondly, the question is what love does? What does love do? How can you recognize this love and what is it found in?

Well, in the time that we have remaining, we are going to see that the practice of love is found in self-sacrifice on behalf of another. John points it out in two different ways here. First of all, we see love as it is seen in the person of Christ, love as it is seen in Christ, I love this, the profundity of this is immeasurable. Remember that earlier in the passage in verse 12, that John had just used Cain as an example of what murder and hatred looked like. He said that Cain hated Abel to the point of murder. What he is going to do here is set the sharpest most absolute kind of contrast with the different example. Cain hated to the point of murder, Jesus Christ loved to the point of ultimate self-sacrifice. This is so humbling, it so magnifies the glory of Christ to our eyes. Look at verse 16, he says:

We know love by this...

Here is what love looks like, here is what does, he says. He is expounding on the concept of love and giving content to it so that we don't have a mystical sense of what it is, some kind of sentimental view. He puts practical application front and center on the definition of love and he goes straight to the person of Christ to do so. In verse 16 he says:

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The duty, the responsibility, the impetus toward Christian love goes right back to the source of our eternal life, it goes back to Christ's death on the cross. And he is pointing out the person of Christ, he is pointing out the sacrifice of Christ as being the example of what Christian love in the church looks like to one another.

Remember this, we are talking about the eternal, perfect sinless Son of God who had all judgment committed to Him, who had every prerogative to judge guilty sinners, you and me, He had the prerogative to judge us because we were sinners and rebels against Him—haters of God, haters of Christ, indifferent to Him, indifferent to His word, dead in our trespasses and sins, by nature children of wrath. And Christ, knowing that fully and more perfectly than anyone, you and I know our own sinful hearts before we were converted, Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, knowing all of that, steps in to the world and goes to Jerusalem to go to the cross, to lay His life down, His sinless, innocent, perfect, righteous life, lay down voluntarily as a sacrifice so that these people that He would save could be delivered from their sins in a way that they could not have effectuate on their own—self-sacrifice to an unlimited degree. That is what John points to as the example of what love looks like, Christ, laying down His life as a substitute to pay the penalty of your sins, Christ, loving you to the point of ultimate self-sacrifice. He is a wonderful,

majestic, glorious savior and with full authority that belongs to God, He sacrificed Himself for you.

Turn back to the gospel of John, I want you to see something. If things like this don't make you just well up with love and gratitude toward Christ, you really, probably are not a Christian because you can't hear these things done on your behalf without being drawn in love and affection for the one who did them. Listen to what Jesus said about Himself in John 10:17-18:

For this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I have received from my Father.

The words of Jesus, it was at His own initiative that He laid down His life, it was His own voluntary sacrifice on behalf of sinners, He says this is the reason that the Father loves me.

Well, how much more for you and me to see this manifested on the pages of scripture, to see Christ laying down at His own initiative, on His own prerogative, out of the own desire of His own selfless love for sinners like you and me to lay down His life to the point of being crucified on a Roman cross that He might redeem us from the bonds of the devil and the bonds of our sins so that we might have eternal life with Him for ever.

Understand that John's point here is for us to go back to that act of self-sacrifice that Christ did on our behalf to see it for the glory that it is and to realize that if we claim to be Christians, if we say that we have appropriated that death, that we partake in the benefits of that death and resurrection, then the forceful compelling conclusion and issue for us is that the same spirit of self-sacrifice that Christ manifested to purchase your salvation should now be manifested in your own life because the power of the Spirit and the power of His own example become the dominating, motivating factor as a grateful response to Him for having done such a wonderful, magnificent act for you that you could never have effectuated on your own. Christians manifest the spirit of self-sacrifice toward one another because the fountainhead of their spiritual life is found in a self-sacrificial act by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, you cannot escape the power of that, you cannot escape the logic of that. If we say that we have the life of Christ living within us, then the sacrificial nature of that life is going to be manifested in our own daily actions as well.

John is pointing out the fact that it was at the cost of Christ's own life voluntarily laid down that we were spared from eternal punishment. Romans 5:8 says:

We know love by this, God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

This is what love looks like, that is love in a biblical sense.

Can I say something in passing, having had to cross this bridge in my own heart in times past? You have to have such a high transcendent view of the love of God, such a high transcendent view of the love of Christ, you have to have such profound view of what the cross represents about the love of Christ toward you that you never, ever let difficult trials in this earth ever cause you to question His love toward you—ever. The cross settles for ever the reality of the love of Christ toward His elect and nothing ever contradicts that. If you are in the midst of trials that make you wonder what God is doing, you are in the midst of trials that make you say why is He doing this, stop right there and go right back to the cross and say “This is the only proof I need of the love of God for my soul, is Christ’s self-sacrifice on the cross on behalf of me when I was separated from Him and I was not seeking Him. He sought me and He sought me at the price of His own blood.”

We have to deal with ourselves. We cannot let those kinds of foul festering questions rides off in sinful rebellion against the love of God as if something earthly was a greater proof of His love or lack or love toward us than the cross was, you have to slay that in your heart. You have to repent if you have been questioning the love of God and say “Oh God, I come back to the cross, I come back to the foot of the cross, I see the blood of Christ being shed for my soul. I see Him calling out ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me’ and doing that on my behalf.” Take your hand and put it over your mouth which wants to speak out questions against the love of God. Repent of that beloved because the sacrifice of Christ on the cross settles the question for ever. If you are a Christian, Jesus Christ has loved you more than you could ever know. And our heart response to that love should be one of unquestioned gratitude and loyalty and faithfulness and obedience that say “Whatever else is happening in life Lord Jesus, I will never question your love because I will never stand before the cross and ask whether your love is real.” We have to repent of those kinds of questions and bring our hearts back to the point of loving gratitude towards such a wonderful self-sacrifice on our behalf without which we would be eternally lost.

Christ should see in our hearts unquestioning loyalty and devotion. When the question of God’s love is raised, our immediate response is “Yes, He loves me, look at the cross. I know things are hard, but look at the cross, look at Him laying down His life for me. Questioning His love? What kind of insanity is that?”

With that clear in our minds, having firmly established that vertical perspective on the love of Christ toward us and understanding that at the core of that was an unspeakably great sacrifice, we do more than just admire that vertically, we realize that this sets the example for how to live our lives in the time that God gives us breath here. The self-sacrifice is more than an act to admire and cherish in the devotional way, this is an example to follow. Because if you are joined to Christ in His self-sacrificial life, if you are in union with Him, if His very nature dwells within you, His Spirit dwells within your heart and is animating and pulsating your spiritual life, His spiritual blood is running through your spiritual vein, then, isn’t it obvious that in one way or another, self-sacrifice is going to be manifested horizontally as well? That’s the logic of the passage, that’s the force of the Apostle John’s argument here. Sacrificial life is a necessary result of being joined to Christ.

So, you say what love proves? It proves that you have eternal life. What does love like? It is self-sacrificial. First of all, you have seen it in the example of Christ in verse 16. Now in verses 17-18, you say what does love do? We are going to see love as it is seen in believers toward one another. Love is seen in Christ, now we are going to turn the corner and see love as it is seen in believers as it is seen in verses 17-18. Now, let me read those verses and set it in our minds here, he says:

Whoever has the world's good and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Most of us will not be called to lay down our lives physically as Christ laid down His life for us, but that doesn't hinder you from following and implementing and immolating the spirit of His example. If you are serious about following Christ, you won't lack the opportunity to show this kind of self-sacrificial love. What does that look like? Get this, love is seen in believers, love is seen in you and in me as we do specific acts of kindness to individuals in the body of Christ who have need—that was the point of verse 18.

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.

What he has in mind here in these two verses is he has in mind a Christian who has an ongoing, not a momentary awareness. This is not talking about passing a beggar in the street, he is talking about life within the body of Christ. And he has in mind a Christian who has an ongoing awareness of an ongoing need in the life of another person in the body of Christ. And what John says, and this is so compelling, look at verse 17, he says:

Whoever has the world's good...

It doesn't mean that you have a lot, maybe it is just a little, but you have something that might meet that need. He says if you have the world's goods and you are seeing on an ongoing basis your brother in need and you close your heart against him, you slam the door and say "I see that need, but I am not going to respond" and you just shut the door on that and you harden your heart, you stiffen your neck against that kind of need even though you have the capacity to meet it, how does the love of Christ abide in you? How does the Spirit of the one who sacrificed His own life for your soul live in you if you can't sacrifice something of your worldly goods for the sake of meeting a need of someone else for whom Christ died? You see, biblical love in the body of Christ is not about sentimental feelings at all. It is empty to talk about love unless you match it with action.

Let me say this, your Christian love starts with those who are closest to you in your circle of life relationships, in your home, in your work, in your school. That is the circle of people that God has given you to primarily start to manifest this practical self-sacrificial love to one another. It is great to be concerned about Africa and to have compassion on the people of Africa, the nameless group of people who most of us have never met and never will meet, it is great to have that concern. But that should only be the overflow of the expression of love that you manifest on a

consistent basis to your closest circle of relationships. If you can't manifest love to your close circle of relationships, notice that we are talking about sacrificial love to that close circle of relationships, if you can't love people that are in your life like that, it is not going to be any good to go to Africa because you are not going to love them when you get there if you can't love the people that you are with right now, and so you start this at home.

One of the qualifications for elders is that a man has his home life in order; he manages his household well. There is a consistency in the private realm of his home life, not hypocrisy that he is one man, seemingly loving on the outside but a guilty, selfish bear at home. No, it starts at home, don't leave this out there, look at the people that are in your life now and say okay, this is the spear where love begins.

James refers to this in James chapter 2, this necessity of practical deeds showing the reality of Christian love, James 2:14-15, he says:

What use is it if someone says he has faith but he has no works. Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food and one of you says to them "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled" and yet you do not give him what is necessary for the body, what use is that? Even so, faith that has no works is dead being by itself.

See, the love of God does not abide in a selfish person. Christians are marked by their sacrificial love toward one another.

Now, step back with me for a moment for there is something so striking about that. John and James and the rest of scripture point us to a manifestation of love that is so ordinary to meet the simple need and yet, the Bible points to that, done on a consistent basis as being proof of the reality of your salvation. True Christians minister to other Christians in need.

There are other scriptures that we could have looked at. Basically it comes down to this with what John is saying, there are only two realms of people, you are either a child of the devil or you are a child of God, you either love the brethren or you are abide in death. Christians see a need in the body of Christ and they meet it when they can, imposters evade the responsibility.

If you are like me, this passage is convicting. I have no doubts about my salvation. I have questions about how consistently I manifest this kind of sacrificial love that the Bible points us to. Understand that you first respond as a Christian to this by confessing your sins to Christ, confess that sinful selfish spirit to Him, remembering that:

...He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The whole point of His death was that His blood would cover our sins. We come back to Him in humility and find forgiveness for our transgressions. And then you look at the relationships closest to you and look for the way that you can express this practical love to those that God has actually placed in your life.

It is a delight to be the pastor of GraceLife and to see how many of you so wonderfully manifest this kind of love. I was preparing this message and I realized, I am surrounded by people who do this. What kind of privilege is being given to me not only to belong to Christ but to know you who live this way.

John Stott summarizes this entire passage well, listen to it as I close, he says: “Hatred characterizes the world. The world’s prototype is Cain. Hatred originates in the devil, it issues in murder and it is evidence of spiritual death. Love characterizes the church. Our prototype is Christ. Love originates in God, it issues in self-sacrifice and it is evidence of eternal life. So, do you belong to Satan or have you passed out of death and in to life, to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?”

This is so rich with the opportunity to go out and practice this today that our hearts should be filled with the desire and the motivation to manifest this kind of self-sacrifice for others in grateful response to the glorious sacrifice of our glorious Lord on our behalf.

Let’s pray together. Our Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ as we go through scriptures and see His love manifested on pages of scripture and realize that you have taken His sacrifice and applied it to our own hearts and forgiven us of our sins so that we might have forgiveness and eternal life. Lord, our gratitude simply knows no bounds. Thank you for the love of Christ. Thank you that our sins have been washed away through His sacrifice on our behalf.

But Lord, our desire as true Christians is not to leave it there, but to see you manifest that kind of love through our lives to obey you like this, to delight in showing the self-sacrificial spirit that ultimately motivated Christ to buy our salvation. We are delighted to be a part of the family of God; give us grace to manifest that to those around us.

And Father, for those who are here, I know there are some, that do not yet know you, I pray that the message of this passage would be so convicting upon their hearts, that the ugliness of sin would be so heavy upon their minds, that the reality that they alone are the sinners before you, that they would turn to you, that you would open their hearts to respond to the gospel call, to repent and believe in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Grant that this season Lord and we will be faithful to thank you for it when we see it manifested. In Jesus’ name. Amen.