

1 John 3:16-19 (NKJV)

16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

Last week we looked at what love does by looking at what **Jesus** did. This week we will revisit the text. Remember our definition of what love does. **Love reaches out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs joyfully from our obedience to God.**

This definition is not on the level of scripture, but I hope that it is helpful because it was derived from what Jesus did for us. And that is how we can know that something is true agape love. We can know that if the definition describes what **Christ** did, it is what **love** does.

16 By this we know love

The word for “know” here is Ginosko. This is not as much experiential knowledge as it is factual understanding. The point is not that, by what Christ did, we now have received **experiential knowledge** of what love is. It is not saying you now know what love is because **you have felt** the love of God. No. It is factual. It is logical. We have been receiving lots of tests from the hand of John. Now we are given a litmus test for determining if something **is** love or if something **is not** love.

We looked last week at the three components. We know that if something is agape love, it has those same characteristics that **Christ's love** had.

If I were to ask you, do you love me, you might have some trouble. You certainly don't like everything I do. Sometimes I irritate you. Sometimes I disappoint you. Sometimes I hurt you. So you might wonder if you really do love me.

But this makes it simpler. If you saw that I truly needed something that you had, no matter how precious it might be to you, if it was a proper thing to give, would you **gladly give it** knowing that **Christ will make it worth your while**. That is an easier question to answer. That brings clarity to the question. That takes it out of a subjective haze of emotional and intentional evaluation and puts it into the world of the testable.

Look at the interaction between Jesus and Peter.

John 21:15-17 (NKJV)

15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

Look at how Jesus connects the **intention** with the **loving action**. Peter was probably in a bind. He was not going to be as cocky as he had been in the past. He had just denied Christ publicly three times, something he did not even think himself capable of. So he probably didn't want to act too cocky. But he was trying to tell the truth. And the truth might have been he may not have been **too sure** that **his love** was **all that good**. But Jesus connects Peter's statement of love with an action of service. It is like Jesus is saying, Peter, I have a need. And my need is that my sheep get fed. If you truly love me, prove it. **Meet my need**. Jesus is saying, "reach out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs out of your devotion to me."

And Christ goes on to tell Peter how Peter was going to die. He basically lets him know that loving Christ was going to cost Peter his life. But Peter, **do it**. This is the model of what love **does**. So we can know what it **is**.

I have good intentions toward all of you. I want all of you to live long and prosper in this life and the next. I do not want harm to befall you. But is that love? I don't know. I can think of myself as being a wonderful person. I am capable of all kinds of self deception. Maybe I love you. Maybe I don't. But when I see your need and I know that I can meet it but I sit on my chair waiting for someone else to do it, the answer is clear. I am not acting lovingly toward you.

And if I get off my chair because I love Jesus and you are one of his kids and I can serve him by serving you, and if I reach out to meet that need, even if it is in the most blundering ineffective manner, you and I can both know that I love you. Can we know that we love each other before it is tested? Not so much. But **need** is what provides the **proving grounds** for **love**.

And we can know that **we love** and we **are** loved by this test.

So we can know if something is loving. By what standard? By what means?
¹⁶ , **because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

We know it on the grounds of mutual sacrifice. Christ died for us. Christ put all of his resources on the line to give us what we need. We should be willing to put **all of our resources** on the line to give others what they need.

Now at this point we might be like the young woman when listening to her husband's proclamation of love. He said "Darling, For you I would swim the widest ocean, I would climb the highest mountain, honey, I would die for you." She looks at him in disapproval and says, "You say that but you never do."

Sometimes love has never required us to go to those dramatic extremes.

Besides Christ, I have never had **anyone die** for me. And I have never **needed** someone to die for me. And dying for someone else would have never provided them what they need. So when the standard is dying for another, it is easy to make the standard meaningless. We might think that until we find a case where I need to **die** for someone, I will never really have **to do anything**. But this laying down one's life, while it does refer to death, it refers to a giving up of one's life.

John used this same word when he described Christ taking off a garment.

John 13:4 (NKJV)

⁴ **Christ rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.**

He also used it in the illustration of a shepherd.

John 10:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.**

Now the point is that the Shepherd will die defending His sheep. But it is completely in character with everything else he is doing. Every day he is giving up his **comfort** for the comfort and **well being** of the sheep. Every day he is **laying aside his selfish interest** for the **interest of the sheep**.

So this laying aside is more than just death. It involves giving up one's life to be used in the service of others. It involves seeing one's own life as being for the purpose of being used to **provide for others**. It is a completely backwards view of life. Physical death is the **ultimate** expression of it. But death is not the **only** expression of it. Any time we give up our selfish desires to meet the need of another person out of obedience to God, we are laying aside our lives. We are dying to ourselves. We are denying ourselves, taking up the cross, and following Christ.

That is why he can say what he says next.

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Giving one's goods is an expression of laying down one's life. It isn't death, but it is on the same continuum of selfless giving.

Now let's look again at this verse. The first thing that is required here is that one has the world's goods. I grew up during the hippy culture. And that culture was questioning everything that they had grown up with. The results weren't always stellar.

There were some that believed that owning material things was not necessary. We ought to all just share them and no one needs to own them. It is sort of what some of the popular politicians declare. Just let the government distribute your goods because it will result in a much better world if you no longer own them but they are used for the common good. Some even believe that owning the world's goods is evil. But scripture never says that. It assumes that people will own property and that the Old Testament law assumes that people **should** and **will** own property. The law of God protected people's property.

So we shouldn't get the idea that **owning things** is evil.

Nor should we get the idea that owning things poses no potential for evil. Like everything else, it is always hard to keep everything in this world in its proper perspective.

1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NKJV)

6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Verses 6-8 gives us the proper view of material possessions and of money. Our hearts are inclined to make gods out of almost anything. Our job, our goods, our shelter, our vehicles, our money, our spouses, our children. We are amazingly resourceful in getting things out of perspective and clasp them tight in our hands as if God cannot wrench them off of us.

So 6-8 says you can't take it with you so enjoy it and be content when your absolute needs for survival are met.

And what is the alternative? Love of the stuff. Working to have stuff is **fine** when it stays in the bounds of the verse 6-8 attitude. Working to have stuff is **evil** as soon as it leaves those bounds and becomes a means of worship, a replacement for God.

Money is not a problem. Money is not evil. It is like the survival impulse. It just is. But now, **what we do with it** will always be exactly as evil as we are. Money is fine. The love of it is evil. Having it is fine, as long as the person who has the money is living a laid aside life, a life that exists to meet the needs of others.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NKJV)

17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

OK here is a command to those who have stuff. They are not told that they are evil to have the stuff. But look at the warning.

Do not **trust** in riches. Isn't that the seduction?

Do you trust in **riches**? Well, how do you respond when your income or your assets are the least bit threatened?

Suppose tomorrow the economy crashes. Instantly it means we will have no means to purchase anything. You know what that event would do? It would expose, for everyone watching, exactly what we trust right now.

If my life falls apart because money is gone, guess who I was NOT trusting? God. If fear of what is sure to happen **overwhelms** me, guess who I was not trusting. God.

This is where poor people have an advantage. Kris Kristofferson was right. When you've got nothing, you've got nothing to lose. But very few of those we know are that poor. The people some of you met in Mexico were.

Do you see the danger? The danger is in allowing something lawful and permissible to take a higher place than it should. The danger is in trusting the gift rather than the giver of the gift.

I absolutely love this phrase-

But trust in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

The problem is identified- trust in the **resource** instead of the **giver of the resource**.

The correction is offered- **change what you trust**.

Then look at the phrase- **who gives us richly all things to enjoy**

It is not until we let go of our control of things, our trust of those things, our dependence of those things, our need of those things, that we can enjoy those things as they were intended to be enjoyed.

There was a time in my life that I held on to relationships too tightly, because I felt that I would not survive without that relationship. But I found that relationships are like wet bars of soap. The tighter you cling to them, the more likely they are to slip out of your hand.

I learned that I can enjoy my relationships with you and with my kids and my wife because what I trust is God. I hope that God does not take any of the relationships I care about from me. No one likes grieving the loss of something valuable. But I think I have lived long enough to know that God will take care of me.

It is only as we live like that, that we can enjoy the gifts we have been **richly given to enjoy**. When we live any other way, desperation robs us of the pleasure of what God has given us. We live in **fear** of **losing** the gift instead of **trusting** the **good intention** of the Giver.

And I think the result in the 1 Timothy passage is interesting.

18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share,

19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Look at the elements here. Those with the world's resources in this present age are to be **ready to give** and **willing to share**. They are to hold the resources in an open hand, always open to the Lord giving or taking away. Living as a **resource of God's**, laying down our selfish interests for His higher interests. We hold our lives as being **God's**. Once we do that, holding our **resources** as being **God's as well** is much easier. It is **congruent** with who we are. Then we are to be ready to give and willing to share. What are we doing when we live like that? We are reaching out to meet a need without regard to what it costs.

And why?

19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Why give? For the reward. That is why. Would these people feel **ripped off** to give up stuff they have worked hard for? Not if they are doing it for the Lord? Why? Because investments made in heaven are not subject to value loss, penalties or fees. We simply cannot lose on that investment. It is backed by the Bank of God, the maker of all things. The smartest investment that can

be made is one in eternity. And it would make sense that those who **trust God most** are most enthusiastic to **contribute to that fund**.

So here again in 1 Tim we see the exhortation to love. It is worded differently. But it is the same thing.

17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

So there is nothing wrong with having the world's goods, as long as the person who has them is living a **laid aside** life, a life given to the Lord's interests.

Now what will that person do if they see a need that their resources can meet?

That is a no brainer. They will **lay aside** the resource like they have **laid aside** their lives. They will use it in the Lord's work knowing that it is the smartest thing they could ever do with that resource.

That is congruent living. That is fitting in with the Christian life. There is really nothing all that dramatic about this. We should expect it of ourselves and each other. We can't always know what need a **fellow believer** should meet. But we should not be surprised that they are **willing to sacrifice something** they **like** for someone they **love**.

In this instance it is a material good, but it could just as easily be time or effort or anything else in our control.

Now, what would stop us from meeting a need? Clearly in this passage the need is understood as a real need. We may go back and forth on whether something truly is a need. Sometimes that is difficult to discern. That is understandable. And we should not feel guilty because we are rationally trying to figure something out. But I really don't think that this is the issue in our passage. The need in our passage has been deeply considered and it is a real need and the believer knows it.

If we really believe something is a need and we have the means to meet it and we will not meet the need, there is only one conclusion. We love the goods more than we love the person. And we want an excuse to not sacrifice that good that we trust and love.

It is interesting that this verse does not say that this person has a **struggle with trust**. It does not put it in any kind of positive light. If you see the need, understand it is a need, have the ability to meet the need, and will not meet it, there is one thing for sure. They are not exhibiting the love of God. They have an **alternate God** that they worship. They do not trust the God that gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Now this one instance may not prove their lack of salvation. But it will be a serious hindrance to assurance.

18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Talk is cheap. Sometimes I am nervous in talking venues, because it is so much easier to **talk well** than to **live well**. Paul's advice to Timothy was to watch both **his life** and **doctrine** closely. We can spout off for hours on end. But those under our influence will usually emulate **what we do**, in spite of **what we say**. More is caught than taught. It is interesting that Jesus told us when making disciples to teach them to obey, and in the context, it probably means to teach them to obey **like we obey**. If our disciples obey like we obey, what would they look like?

At one point in my life I stopped reading spiritual books. I stopped because I noticed my talking was improving but my living was not. And it seemed to me to be very dangerous to be able to talk much better than I live.

We need to understand that **voicing good intentions** is not love. It might be genuine. We may be telling the truth about how we feel. But it gets nothing done. It is like saying- I should do this. I should do this. I should do this. But I never make a calendar entry to get something done.

Love is the powerful **work of God** that moves a **person of God** to action to meet a need for the **glory of God**. Anything other than that cannot be proven to be love. When I say, let's meet this need but my first action is not to spend my resources for that endeavor, that probably is not love. The rule of thumb is that if it costs me nothing, it is probably worth nothing. Think about it.

Love costs. The people who have loved me have spent a lot. My mom and dad changed diapers, they dealt with my evil and idiocies, they did not kill me, they worked hours and hours on end, they required that I go to church, they supported me when I went into full time ministry, they..... loved me.

At one point in my life, and looking back it was a very low point, I criticized them for not telling me they loved me. But I was an idiot. By every biblical definition I was thoroughly and continually loved.

Love costs. When you come to me to correct me for something I have said or done, it costs you. When I try to help you with some problem you are facing, it costs me. That is all good. That is what our lives are for.

We just cannot think that voicing all kinds of good intentions toward anyone delivers any mail. I do that at work all the time because I want those people to work with me and for me. But it is not love. When I tell them the gospel, that is love. And that costs me something.

When is the last time you paid a cost to meet someone's need and you were glad to do it because it was for Christ. Congratulations. That is love.

That is loving in deed and truth.

And what is the result? Well one of the results is that we will be richly rewarded. And that is cool.

But look at this.

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

There is no ambiguity here. When we love, when we spend our resources for no other reason than that a fellow believer needs them and we want to please our Lord, we can have assurance that something supernatural is happening here. If we give for **other reasons**, we **cannot** be sure. But if we don't care if we even get a thank you from the person we are serving, and we are glad to do it, that is a sign we have the Jesus disease. We have caught something that we could not have created.

Our obedience will never be perfect. So we often have reason, based on our record, to wonder if we are really a believer. But when we see ourselves love someone only for the sake of loving them, we can have confidence that we are a believer. We can gain some assurance.

And sometimes that is more important to us than the eternal reward we will receive.

When we love like Jesus, when we have the family trait of love, we can have great confidence that we must be part of the family.

Who are you loving, not looking for anything in return, giving up things of value to you, trying to meet a need, only because you know that it is what our Lord wants you to do? Congratulations. That is agape love. And you didn't put it there. Jesus did. And that is one of the truest assurances that you are a child of His.