

## 1 John 3:16-18 (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.**

This sermon this morning may be one of the most practical truths I have ever learned. I hope you glean as much from these truths as I have.

Carla's cat likes Carla more than she likes me. If I am in bed when the door gets opened in the morning, her cat will jump up on the bed, come over to be petted by me a little bit. Then she will go elsewhere.

But if **Carla** is in the bed, the cat will do everything she can to be as close to Carla as she can possibly get. She will lay across Carla's neck or on her head. She will crawl down into the covers. She just **loves** being with Carla.

Now, how **smart** is that cat? Is that cat **deciding things** about commitment and a wise use of her life, or about the duty she has to "like" Carla?

No. It is a cat, so it is capable of very little rational thought. My point is that animals **like** things. Animals have **preferences** based on their perceptions. They are inclined to like something and dislike something without making any difficult decisions.

Now, sometimes as Christians, there are other Christians that we do not like. And it is easy to feel guilty about that. We read our passage and we think, I must love this person. And we think that, surely **liking** a person is on the same **continuum** as loving them. Liking them **a little** is at least heading on the same continuum as **liking them intensely**, which we might think means **loving** them. But as we think about it, we see that liking and loving are two different animals. A cat can **like** something. A dog can **like** something. And in the same way humans **like** things. Those people around us who are not committed to Christ **like** all kinds of things. They like their **friends**. They like their **family**. But we can know by what scripture says about love that they simply cannot love like the scriptures tell us that **Christians** love if they are not a believer. Whatever this loving **is** that we are told to do, it has **supernatural** origin. So if you come across a Christian that you do not particularly like, don't waste time trying to **feel differently** or **feeling guilty**. Your seamer is broken. It produces inaccurate feelings. Simply determine to treat that person the way Christ tells you to. And everything else that is **supposed** to happen **will** happen.

So the point in all this is that **liking** is natural. **Loving** is supernatural. Don't worry about liking. Focus on **loving**.

Now that we have **that** misconception about love out of the way, there is another important element.

Look at our larger text in 1 John. We just saw that Cain hated Abel and took his life in his hatred of Abel. That is what hatred's ultimate aim is. If hatred had its full expression, **hatred takes another's life for one's own benefit**.

Now look at our text.

**By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.** What did Christ do? He **gave** His life for our benefit. There we can see the core difference between the two. When love has its full expression it will **spend ones own life** for the benefit of another. Hatred **takes** life for its own benefit. Love **gives** life for the other's benefit. This may help us as we try to decide whether something is **loving or hateful**.

I have been looking forward to our text this morning. This passage has had an impact on my life probably more than any other passage. Because it is here that we are told **what love does**. I used to say it tells us what love **is**. But I think that is not as accurate as it could be. It is here that we can make a definition of what **love does**. And as a Christian trying to live a Godly life, that has to be one of the most important concepts to understand. What is **this thing we call love**? Or more accurately, if something is love, what will it **do**? How does it **act**? How can you know what it is? How can we tell if we are **doing it**?

For some reason, I went through my church experience without understanding the core importance of loving the brothers. I understood the Christian life as primarily- **witness for Christ and don't sin**. While that was somewhat helpful, it did not teach me one of the most important things that life was for. I was surrounded by people that were very loving in the church I attended. And for all I know, I probably heard hundreds of sermons telling me what love was. But for whatever reason, it did not catch. I was in college before I began to understand just how important it was to love fellow believers. I began to understand the need for **REAL church**.

Then I was teaching some kind of group at Oak Grove when I stumbled upon this passage. And it helped me so radically that I have never forgotten what I learned.

**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.**

We know love by this. Have you ever wondered how to **know** if a person **really loves you**? Have you ever wondered how to know if **you are really**

**loving someone else?** Have you ever wanted an **active definition of what love does?** Well here it is.

Love is what Jesus did when He laid down His life for us. And when we follow His example, we are loving. So the million dollar question for us is- **what did Jesus do?**

This is the definition I put together all those years ago. I have changed it a little over the years. But it is, for the most part, intact. And it has tested true to scripture everywhere as far as I know.

**Love reaches out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs joyfully from our obedience to God.**

Now, I don't know what electricity is. But I know it is present when the **lights go on**. And I don't know what love is. But I know it is there when someone **does this stuff**. Love is from God. If **God's love** is living in us, **God** is living in us. If a person is truly laying down his life, even in small ways, to love this way, you can have confidence that this person is a brother.

The world has no incentive to love like this. They will tend to take care of those who they **like**, like the cat prefers Carla. They can't joyfully make sacrifices of themselves for the sake of pleasing God. The natural person has to extract some kind of reward from the act of love. There has to be a payoff of some kind from the act itself. And if there is no perceived reward, there will be no act. But a believer expects a reward, not from **the act** of love, but from the **Giver of love**.

For instance- a non believer may give most of his income to help starving people in Africa. Their only reward may come from the self satisfaction of having helped someone. But you can rest assured that they would not give that money to people who were also guilty of killing his son. Their benevolence ends where the fleshly benefit ends, wherever that might be for them.

But a true believer carrying out real Agape love is completely free from **receiving a reward** for their loving actions. They are not doing what they do for a reward **now**. So they are not surprised when **they don't get one**. That is one of the easiest tests of whether we are truly doing a loving act. What happens when we don't get the response we want?

A believer is the only person who is free to love with no hooks and no regrets. So how about **our** love?

How many times have you been offended because a person didn't return your gesture of kindness? How many times have you sulked because your act of service went unnoticed or unappreciated or un-applauded? Or how about when someone else gets credit for things that come so hard for you, and no

one seems to notice your progress? Are you tempted to take your ball and go home?

All that proves is that whatever you were doing, it wasn't totally for Jesus. You were doing it, at least partly, for the reward that the action would itself bring. Love is always done for the joy that is set before us. If you find yourself giving regretfully, stop giving until you can do it for the right reason. If you are serving regretfully, quit serving until you can do it for the right reason. God loves a cheerful giver. Any other kind of giver isn't acting according to love or trust in God. It is just **flesh** in a **pretty wrapper**.

Go to Jesus and see if He is not **worth** doing your service for. See if He will not **make it worth your while**. The church cannot afford people in the church acting by the world's so called love. We will just mess it up. It will take all the time and resources of the church to just deal with the drama created by unloving people.

Jesus promises a rich reward for our service to Him. Our love is **enabled** and **motivated** by that fact. That's why the church can be a group of people who give and give without worrying about getting. They are the ones who can afford it. Because they will never run out of the reward that God will give them. They operate in the belief that Christ will make it worth it.

Now back to the definition. **Love reaches out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs joyfully from our obedience to God.**

Love reaches out to meet the needs. What do you need? You need everything scripture says you need. Food, clothing, shelter, encouragement, exhortation, rebuke, someone to cry with. Someone to laugh with. Someone who shares the common goals of following Christ. There is a lot that we need.

So how do we reach out to **meet that need**? Meeting the need presupposes that we have **thought about** that need. I am convinced that one of the major reasons we don't love each other better is because we are obsessed with thinking about our own lives. The projects we are undertaking are the only pressing, important projects. The ministry we are involved in is the only pressing important ministry. It's not that we **intend** to overlook what is in our brother's best interest. We've just been so obsessed with **our own** plans and goals and strategies that we simply haven't considered their needs. Even our prayers for each other tend to be an afterthought. Am I talking to you? I know I am talking to me.

And we make life decisions, major life decisions, and what do we consider? How will this affect my finances, my family's welfare, my time, etc. But do we stop to think how our decisions will effect the rest of the people we are

connected to in the body of Christ? Do we have different standards of what the people in **my family** really need as opposed to what does a person in **another family** really need?

It takes time and thought to place ourselves in our brother's shoes. I believe that loving is actually one of our **imagination's** highest purposes. I have the power to imagine what it is like to be you. But I have to consider the facts of your life with the same intensity that I consider the facts of my own. Loving requires doing that.

And I have very rich resources to consider your need because I am an absolute expert at examining my own. I have a core competence. I love me. Our self interest is a "given" in scripture. We are never told to have it. It is assumed we have it. Animal instincts to **survive** are not good or bad. They just **are**. And all of us possess that self interest. What we do with it, now that can be very good or bad. But there is nothing evil in a deer running from a dog or a baby catching their first breath. We are born with a drive for survival. We **love ourselves**.

In our church I believe that if a need is obvious we will meet it. And that is a good thing. I have seen sacrificial giving. I have seen people putting each other in the other's shoes. And it is always a sweet thing to see. But I think we always have room to grow in that regard. We tend to be **experts** at how **we want to be treated**. But we tend to be **novices** in how **someone else** might need to be treated. There is always room to grow in that. And the competence we display in meeting **our own needs** is often the evidence that we could do better in doing that for **someone else**. We know **how**. We just need to expand it.

Now let's move on.

**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?**

The key to the problem here is in the phrase- shuts up his heart. It is odd that there is very little to go on here. It pretty well means what it says. The person sees the need and knows that action is called for but, it silences that knowledge. It's heart gives another reason for why the meeting of the need is not required.

How have **we** determined that we **do not need** to meet the need that we see? This is something we really must need to be careful of. It would be better to waste money on needs that do not exist than to train ourselves not to give because it might be a waste of money. We must not become adept at shutting up our hearts.

The word for **see** in sees his brother in need is theoreo (thēh o reh' o). It means to behold, to consider, to perceive. one who looks at a thing with interest and for a purpose. It is used primarily, not of an indifferent spectator, but of one who looks at a thing with interest and for a purpose; It would be used of a general officially reviewing or inspecting an army. So this is **strong** looking. It is not, in any way, an **ignorance** of the need. It is a **close inspection** of the need.

I think that, if we fail, we may fail here. We do not pour ourselves out to see the need. We don't zoom into the needs of others. I thank God that there are some needs that I know we do this. But there is always more opportunity to do the same.

What we see in verse 17 are supposed believers who have some resources, and they are **acutely aware of a need** of another believer, but they come up with a reason, a heartless reason, for why they are not required to meet that need. And the question is, **how does the love of God abide in him?** And the implication is clearly that the love of God does **NOT** abide in him.

These are people who are failing to love because the price is too high. The love **inspired by God reaches out without regard to personal cost**. Jesus **died** for us. That was **His** kind of love. And anything short of dying to us is just incidental. So if you have a real need and I have the provisions to meet it, that is all I need to know. What it costs is really not of any significance. That is what Christ's love is like.

Ask yourself this. Is there anyone here you wouldn't die for if you knew your death was the only way they could make it? Laying down our lives for our brothers and sisters is a given in the Christian life. Anything short of a willingness to do that that is failure. And when people are prepared to give up their lives, giving up their possessions is a small price to pay.

Another application of this teaching is to consider **who loves us**. We tend to think that anyone who does nice things toward us loves us. But that is deceptive. Sometimes people want something from us. So if they are nice **to us** they can get something **from us** that has great value to them. Their gestures aren't loving at all.

Then there are others who are genuinely giving us what they think we need. And they may be doing the best they can. Sometimes their style isn't very endearing. Maybe they do not convey their loving intentions well. It may not feel like love when it is offered to us.

The test of real love is when we have nothing of value **to offer that person** and they **still treat us lovingly**. Will a person love us when we are “the least of these”? That is when we can have confidence that we are being loved. Remember the judgment seat in Matt 25:31-46 when Jesus separates the believers from the unbelievers. What was his criteria?

**Matthew 25:31-46 (NKJV)**

**31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.**

**32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats.**

**33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.**

**34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:**

**35 for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;**

**36 I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'**

**37 Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink?**

**38 When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*?**

**39 Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'**

**40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.'**

**41 Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:**

**42 for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;**

**43 I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'**

**44 Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'**

**45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.'**

**46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**

The judgment was based on what they did to the least of these. The smallest most insignificant member of the body of Christ is the **best test**. Because they are the ones that **you love** because **you are loving**, not because you stand to get anything. So if you want to know if a person is loving, give them the “least of these” test. Watch how they treat the people that have nothing to offer them. If a person serves those kinds of people when no one appears to be looking, you are probably dealing with a believer. And if you are picking a mate, choose a “**least of these**” kind of lover. Because there will be days when you find yourself in the least of these category. In those times it will only be the person’s love for Christ that causes him or her to love you.

Now let’s take a look at the fact that **love springs joyfully from our obedience to God**.

Love is a duty and privilege that is born in grace and nurtured in gratitude. It is the people who have been **forgiven much** and been **loved much** that can love others **much**. Because only us sinners can appreciate God’s grace. For us to love is to receive God’s attitude in our hearts. God is love. How would it be possible for that which flows from **Gods heart** be a **drudgery** to us? If we are grateful for our salvation at all, we will appreciate its **means**. If a sinless Christ loved us while we were **His enemies**, surely loving a brother who is no worse than us is not too much to ask.

If we find it hard to love a brother, we can be sure the problem isn’t God or our brother. Really, why would we not love a brother? Would it not require that we regard ourselves **better** than that brother? Would we not have to leave the level ground of the cross and place ourselves **just a bit higher**?

The same is true if we **grudgingly** love our brother. We show that we really do not understand that we are only offering the same love **we received**. We think somehow that we **deserved love** more than this person **deserves love**. But if we think about that, we know that is nonsense. No one deserves the love of God. No one deserves to be saved while still an enemy of God. Grace is what we are saved by. There is no merit.

True love of another believer begins with our own humility. It begins with the understanding of how **I have been loved**. Then it regards that other human being with the same regard. And if they are in our own spiritual family, if they are Jesus kin, how could we withhold love? How could we not look after their best interest? It is all based upon our love for God which is ultimately based upon God’s love for us.

We learn that Christ met our need joyfully.

**Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV)**

**<sup>1</sup> Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of**



witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, *who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

This is how Christ loved us. He loved us joyfully.

So now, what happens if we leave out any of these **elements** of love?

Remember our definition.

**Love reaches out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs joyfully from our obedience to God.**

Let's leave out that **love meets needs**. What we have left is a Jesus and me mentality. It is a spirituality that focuses on one's self and one's relationship with Jesus. It will focus on one's own experiences with Christ. But it has no outward focus. It may look for wonderful spiritual experiences. It may look to do wonderful acts of sacrifice. But it misses the whole heart of Christ. It helps no one else. This is why the monastic experience is so misguided. Christ's desire is that we love one another. And that requires involvement in the lives of others.

If our love does not reach out to meet another's need, it is not the kind of love Jesus had.

OK, let's leave out the **lack of regard for personal expense**.

Now we have something that might look good, but it is no different from the world. This kind of love will not meet the need if the cost is too high. It is a pseudo love that would never have gotten Christ out of heaven. At the end of the day it leaves the most important needs unmet.

**James 2:15-16 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> **If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,**

<sup>16</sup> **and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it profit?***

Look at the **positive regard** in this statement. Look at the stated intention.

The gushing sentiment. Brother I wish you well. Brother I wish you to have all these wonderful things. But brother, I have no intention to have **your need cost me things that I value**. This kind of false love **looks loving**, states loving intentions, but it does not **deliver** anything of value.

There is something to learn here. If we love someone, we use our own resources to meet that need. If we are not willing to use our own resources to meet a need, we are hypocritical to bring that need to the church. But if our resources are not enough to meet the need, then we call in others to meet the

need. True love starts with the effort and desire to meet the need regardless of the cost. This love says this need is important enough to me that I will spend my resources, my time, my effort, my money to meet it, no matter what. Then sometimes wisdom demands that we pull others into the need so we can meet it. But love does not work with a committee mindset that says, let's discuss this need so maybe it will be met but I can get out of meeting it. Someone else can. It does not start with a mindset that says, **let's all** of us meet this need, or **you** should meet this need. It starts with the mindset, can **I** meet this need? That is the example of Christ's love for us.

The kind of love that wishes well wishes, but refuses to pay a cost is a major disappointment to anyone who depends upon it. It is a love that promises more than it performs. It looks better than it is. It is loving with word and tongue, but never gets to the word and truth. Real love reaches out to meet the need.

Then let's leave out the last element, obedience to God.

**Love reaches out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs joyfully from our obedience to God.**

Look at what 1 Cor 13 says.

**1 Corinthians 13:3 (NKJV)**

**<sup>3</sup> And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.**

Here is a person who meets the need through great personal expense, but they still do not have love. They are obviously doing the right thing. But they do not yet have the **right reason**. They are not doing this thing from a joyful obedience to God.

Love that does not spring from joyful obedience always has a selfish motive. There is likely to be a **hook** involved. This giving will be done with the expectation of some **reward for services rendered**. If you give with an **expectation of getting something** you want, it is not love. And it is good to be honest about that. Call it a deal and name your terms before you do the good deed. That is honest communication. It is not love. But it may have a place in meaningful relationships. It is far better to have clear communication about the fact that you are **giving something to get something** than to pretend to have a loving motive and not really have it. You won't look as good when you do it. But truth about our intentions is better than pretending to be better than we are. Truth about our intentions is walking in the light.

True love says that **I will do this thing** because it is the thing that **will please Christ**. And that is what I am doing it for. So if I do not receive anything in return, I will not claim "foul". I did not do it for a return on investment. I did it

because it was the thing that would please Christ. And I regard that **pleasing Christ** is my reward.

Much of our disappointment with other believers is that the sacrifice we made for them did not have a good return on our investment. But if we think about that deeply enough we will discover that we are telling on ourselves. If I truly did that thing because it was the right thing to do, and I pleased Christ by doing such a thing, even if that person shows their self to be unappreciative, we know that **Christ will regard our faithfulness**. Why is that not good enough? And if we trace that truth, we will find that we did that thing expecting a payoff. And when we did not get that payoff, we thought we had a right to complain. The big question is, why? If we did this thing for Christ, and Christ saw it and Christ will reward it, why is it such a big deal that someone else does not appreciate it? And it is at that point that we find our motives were duplicitous. We were giving to get. And we see ourselves for what we really are.

Love, while it **hopes the best for the beloved**, does not depend upon a **positive reward from the beloved**. Everything that love does, it does for a higher reason. And often we tell on ourselves by our responses to other's reactions to our love. If we love for Christ's sake, the love we did was sufficient. We expect no payoff from the beloved. But if what we are doing is giving something in the hope of getting something, we will always react negatively when what we gave is not reciprocated.

Imagine a group of people who lived by this kind of love. Imagine people who wrestled with the stuff that goes on inside them, determined to **always** and **only** do loving things. Imagine the honesty that requires. And imagine the **benefit** to those who are **part of that group**. They are surrounded by people who they are convinced **would die to do them good** and are committed to **never doing them harm**. Imagine how enticing that environment would be to the world around them? Well guess what. That is church as the Bible defines it. That is why John talks about this over and over. Love is what makes up real church. And the final proof in judgment of whether we really were part of church is, did we love those who Jesus loved just because Jesus loved them.

**Love reaches out to meet the need without regard for personal expense that springs joyfully from our obedience to God.**

I challenge us all to pray this prayer this week.

Lord, please show me where I am not pleasing you by the way I am treating a brother or sister, and guide me into loving them the way You loved me.