

## Loving One Another (1 Jn 3:11-18)

Last week we learned that the book of 1 John was written to give new, first century Christians and the first lay leaders of the church three tests for determining which teachers they should listen to. Some self-appointed teachers had strayed from the orthodox teachings of Jesus and were teaching a mix of Christianity, Judaism and eastern mysticism. This book gives three tests for knowing who the true believers are:

The doctrine test asks “What do they say about Jesus Christ?”

The obedience test asks “How do they live their lives? And

The love test asks “How do they treat other believers?”

Last week we studied the obedience test and learned that because God’s amazing love has made us his own dear children, we are liberated from the bondage to sin and free to live in joyful obedience to Christ.

This week we are looking at the love test. The false teachers in John’s day claimed to have a higher knowledge. They were called Gnostics, literally “the knowers.” Their sense of intellectual and spiritual superiority led to an elitism that made it impossible for them to love other believers or demonstrate that love through sacrificial service. In today’s passage, John is going to tell us that active, self-giving love is proof of being a true follower of Christ.

Several weeks ago I had the wonderful opportunity to see brotherly love in action. After 12 years of service here, I was finally invited on the annual Dick Larson Canadian fishing trip. Now, for the guys here today who were on that trip,

don't get nervous. "What's done in Canada stays in Canada." It was a great week of fun and fellowship, ten hours a day in a boat for eight days. One of the ways that we demonstrated our sincere love for one another was to give each other grief all day long, all in good fun, of course. I was in Ken Zimmerman's boat with Billy Sanderson, our middle school pastor for most of the time, and we each rode the other two mercilessly all week long. I don't know how Billy got invited after only six months on staff, but that's another issue. All three of us are avid fishermen with the ability to cast a lure with pinpoint accuracy. On one occasion when I cast my lure toward the bank, a big fish took a swipe at it and missed. Now, acceptable fishing etiquette means that I'm going to hit that spot again to try to get that fish. No sooner do I start reeling in my lure when Billy's lure hit the exact same spot. I looked over at him in sincere Christian love and said, "If you catch my fish, I'm throwing your butt overboard."

On another occasion, Billy hooked the fish of a lifetime, a 38" muskie. It was really impressive. Of course, that fish was nowhere near as big as my 44" muskie, but I really shouldn't bring that up. Billy fought that fish for over 10 minutes, and I captured the whole thing with a video camera he brought along on the trip. He was so elated when he finally got that fish in the boat; in time his breathing and heartbeat returned to normal and he stopped squealing like a schoolgirl. We got the fish back in the water and Billy sat down exhausted. He looked up at me and asked, "Did you get all that on video?" "Oh, yeah, yeah" I replied, "You're going to love it!" I let a few seconds go by before I asked, "Hey, by the way, what does the word 'standby' mean in the preview screen?" We all had a great time showing this kind of brotherly love and good-hearted joking all week long. And in Billy's defense I should reveal that he did in fact have the biggest

catch of the week. Here's a video I shot at just the right moment: [show video]

Well, today's study in 1 John 3 is not simply about the kind of enjoyable fellowship we shared together last week, he goes beyond that to show us that love between Christians is a proof of a spiritual relationship with God and mirrors the kind of love that Jesus shows to us. So let's study verses 11 through 18 together. There's an outline in your bulletin for you to follow along. This passage contains three central thoughts about love, and the first is

#### I. The exhortation to love (11-13)

John begins his exhortation to love by telling us first that

##### A. Love arises from obedience.

Here's another example of how John discusses the relationship between the three tests. Last week we studied the obedience test, and today we begin by seeing that love arises out of obedience.

Here's what he writes in verse eleven:

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. (1 Jn 3:11)

John loves this phrase "from the beginning." His gospel opens with the words, "In the beginning was the Word..." and this shorter epistle of John opens, "That which was from the beginning..." John says that love was the central theme of Jesus' message and since he was there from the very beginning, he is qualified to reinforce our Lord's commands. John was among the first of the disciples called to follow Christ. He and his brother James were commercial fisherman, sons of a man named Zebedee. As the youngest of the disciples, John seemed to always be the one who gravitated most closely to Christ. In fact, his nickname in the gospel is, "The disciple whom Christ loved," not to indicate

that Jesus didn't love them all equally, but that there was a special bond between Jesus and John.

John was the one who sat most closely to Christ during the last supper. He was probably the only one who knew that Judas was the betrayer. He was the only disciple who followed Jesus to his trial in the high priest's home and the only disciple to kneel at the foot of the cross. He was the only disciple Jesus spoke to from the cross; into his charge was given the care of Jesus' mother, Mary. So when John writes about Jesus' self-sacrificial love and says that the message of love can be traced back to the very beginning, he knows what he's talking about.

When John tells us that the command to love was there in the beginning, he is not only speaking of historical chronology. He is also indicating that love is the preeminent Christian virtue, the foundation upon which all Christian doctrine rests. Just hours before his arrest, Jesus had said to his disciples,

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (Jn 13:34-35)

Throughout 1 John 3, John pivots back and forth between discussions of love and hate. So he goes on to tell us that while love arises from obedience,

#### B. Hate arises from jealousy (12-13)

In verses 12 and 13 he writes:

Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (1 Jn 3:12-13)

Last week we saw that John helps us understand one concept by immediately comparing it to its opposite, so he goes back to the beginning of the biblical record to find the greatest contrast to love, jealousy in the heart of a man that gave rise to hatred and eventually yielded the fruit of murder in the first human family.

Genesis 3 describes the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It's fascinating to consider what the months and years immediately after the fall must have been like for them. Certainly they must have been filled with remorse as they considered their actions. They must have clung to the promise they had received that one day God would renew all things, not understanding when that renewal would eventually take place. They certainly remembered the words God spoke to one of the most beautiful animals in the Garden, later condemned to writhe on its belly in the dust:

“... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Gen 3:15)

So Adam and Eve looked forward to the one who would eventually avenge them by crushing the serpent's head. And you can almost hear the joyful delight in Eve's voice recorded in chapter 4 when she becomes pregnant with her first child:

"With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." (Gen 4:1)

I think she fully expected her son, Cain, to be the messiah, the promised one of God who would set things right. Can you imagine their sorrow to learn that rather than being one who would bring new life, Cain was the first to take a life?

John sheds a tremendous amount of light on the story of Cain and Abel in just a few words. Look at what he tells us:

First, John tells us that Cain “belonged to the evil one.” Remember that John had just made reference to the devil, the accuser, in the previous verses. He is making a set of parallel comparisons here. Cain is of the evil one, represents the world and is characterized by hate. Abel represents true believers who come from God and are characterized by love.

Secondly, when John writes that Cain “murdered his brother,” his choice of words really opens up the story for us. John didn’t use the simpler, generic word that would be translated “killed,” rather he chose a very precise word that is translated “murdered.” Some English translations use the word “slew” or even “slaughtered” in this verse. The only other time this word is used in scripture is to describe the acceptably prescribed motion that a priest would use to slash the throat of an animal for sacrifice in worship. Now, animal sacrifice in worship and the mistreatment of animals in general is reprehensible to us today. To us it seems barbaric and grotesquely violent, because it was. Yet it was prescribed by God as an act of worship precisely for that reason, for the violent killing of every innocent animal for thousands of years pointed directly to the cross of Jesus, the final innocent sacrifice who was slaughtered for our redemption.

We have to read into the Genesis account just a little bit, but I don’t believe we’re doing the biblical record a disservice to imagine Adam and Eve watching in horror as God killed the first innocent animal, using its skin to make a covering for them. We can be sure that after watching, this the consequences of sin were permanently etched into their minds. We have to assume that God instituted animal sacrifice as an act of worship and that he showed Adam and his sons the acceptable manner for quickly and humanely killing an animal.

John asks the question of his readers:

...why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

The Genesis passage tells us that because Abel lived a righteous life and Cain lived an unrighteous life, a cancerous jealousy raged in Cain's heart. That's why his worship sacrifice was not accepted by God while his brother Abel's was. Worship has always been more about the heart of the worshipper than about the mechanics of worship.

The jealousy in Cain's heart festered and grew into hatred. And because worship was at the root of that hatred, he used an element of worship, the process prescribed for animal sacrifice, to slaughter his brother. John then applies his point by adding:

Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

Now, this raises a very interesting question for us. You'll remember in last week's study, John had said "The world doesn't know us" and we asked if that were still true today. So let's take a similar approach this week. It was certainly true that the world of John's day viciously hated the church. In those days Christianity was viewed as a Jewish sect and the Jews were routinely persecuted by Rome. The temple in Jerusalem had been leveled about 25 years before 1 John was written, and the Christian church was about to suffer intense persecution in the years to come. But things are different today. In 2000 years, the church has had a profound impact on the world. So is it still true that the world hates the church and that we shouldn't be surprised by this hatred? This question deserves far more time than I have to give during this sermon and might make for an interesting discussion for your family or your small group, so I've put some thoughts on the sermon notes page in your bulletin.

Well, we've seen the exhortation to love in the first few verses. Next, John goes on to describe

## II. The evidence of love (14-15)

He writes:

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. (14-15)

Again, we continue with the contrast of love and hate, and John tells us first that

### A. Love is evidence of a spiritual resurrection.

Love is a characteristic of those who have a spiritual relationship with God because, as 1 Jn 4:16 says, "God is love." The totality of our relationship with God occurs within the sphere of love. We love others and we love God because he first loved us. The life of Christ was one of loving obedience to the Father's will and unparalleled love to the people he met. Paul lists love as the first fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. So if a person is living in habitual loving service to God and to others, we have evidence that they are children of God. By contrast, John tells us that

### B. Hate is evidence of spiritual death.

John says,

Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer... (14-15)

It's worth noting here that according to John, the natural state of man is death. It is only through the gracious intervention of God that salvation occurs and we "pass from death to life."

John says, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.” At first it may seem like unnecessary exaggeration for John to equate hate with murder. After all, as bad as it may be, at least hatred is confined to our own heart. It must be a much worse thing to actually commit murder than it is to hate someone. From the standpoint of human reasoning this makes sense, but from a spiritual perspective we have the teachings of Christ to describe the equivalence of hatred and murder. Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” (Mt 5:21-22)

Why does the Bible teach that hatred is the same as murder and that a person who harbors hatred in their heart has no part in God’s kingdom? This is a difficult issue, but once you follow the Bible’s logic it begins to make sense.

To begin with, there is no possession more prized by a person than their existence—the urge for self-preservation is one of the strongest impulses we have as humans. To hate someone is to earnestly desire that that person cease to exist. Sometimes, hatred bears the actual fruit of homicide, but whether the person carries out the final act or not, they have in essence murdered them by wishing the end of their existence. So hatred is murder, and anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

We noted last week that John’s prose sometimes seems unnecessarily repetitive, but that when we look more closely we see John taking us to new layers of meaning with each restatement of the theme. So as my friend Greg Lappin says, we’re going to continue to peel the layers of the onion on love and hate until we get down to the irreducible essence of the matter. So after exhorting us to love and

demonstrating the evidences of love, John finally brings us to

### III. The essence of love.

I like the way John writes. I mean, how could you be any more clear than this:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (16)

That really says it all, doesn't it? John shows us here first that

#### A. Love is proven by self-sacrifice.

Again, studying a little deeper to the actual words used by John in the original language is helpful here. When we hear the phrase "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives..." the image that comes to most of our minds is of Christ's crucifixion, so we might rightly ask, "Is John suggesting that we all have to become martyrs for one another to demonstrate our love?" That's a wonderful gesture, but unfortunately you only get to do that once. No, but in some ways what John is asking is as demanding as martyrdom. Many times the best way to understand the meaning of a word in scripture is to examine other places in the Bible where the same word is used, so let's do that here.

In the gospel of John when John was describing the events of the Last Supper, he used this same phrase to describe Jesus' preparation for washing the disciple's feet:

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, *took off* his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist (*italics added*). (Jn 13:3-4)

"Took off" is the same phrase translated "laid down" in 1 John. Some translations of John 13 say he "laid aside" his garments, so the concept here is not so much one of

martyrdom as of service. Actively loving other believers often involves us “laying aside” something that is important to us. Sometimes we have to lay aside our pride and the desire for prominence and let someone else lead. You can find stacks of books about leadership at Barnes and Nobles, but have you ever seen a book about “followership”? Sometimes we have to lay aside our personal agenda and demonstrate our love by letting someone else call the shots. Sometimes we have to lay aside our anger at another person’s offenses, even when we are fully justified to be angry, deciding to love as Christ loved and choosing forgiveness over jealousy. So sometimes laying aside your life for someone can be as difficult as giving up your life for someone, and this is the essence of Godly love.

And so by contrast, while the essence of love is self-sacrifice,

#### B. Hate is revealed by social apathy (17-18)

John uses a highly effective method of writing to drive his point home, the use of rhetorical question. You know what a rhetorical question is, it’s a question with an presumed answer. You don’t really ask the question to find out what’s going on; it’s more designed to find out whether or not the person being asked knows what’s going on.

I’ve discovered that many women have the spiritual gift of asking rhetorical questions, and I’m not referring to any one woman specifically, just women in general. However, you may not know that I am terribly color-blind, and on more than one occasion the woman I live with has asked, “Did you mean to wear that tie with that shirt?” (By the way, she’s out of town this weekend, so if this tie doesn’t match this shirt, just don’t say anything.)

It may be to men’s benefit that women are good at asking rhetorical questions. Some of us have heard questions like,

“Do you think a professional tree surgeon would have a ladder tall enough to reach those branches?” or “I just talked to your mother. Did you forget to tell me that she was coming for a two-week visit?”

John builds a logical argument in this letter that leads to a powerful rhetorical question. Follow his logic with me: Point one:

God is love. (1 Jn 4:8) (point two:)

God’s love for us is so great that we are called the children of God. (1 Jn 3:1) (point three:)

His Son, Jesus Christ is the epitome of self-sacrifice. (1 Jn 3:16)

Now, if anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 Jn 3:17)

God saw us in our lost estate, helpless and hopeless to remove our sin. He took pity on us, sending his very own Son to suffer the penalty for our offenses, offering us forgiveness and reconciliation. He saw us in our need and was moved with compassion to redeem us. So if a person sees their neighbor in desperation and is not moved with that same Godly compassion to meet their needs, how can they claim to be in fellowship with God. After asking this pointed question, John tenderly entreats:

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (18)

John is a very practical book, so let’s conclude with two very practical questions we can ask ourselves to discern if we are applying the truths of this scripture to our lives.

My first question may seem an odd one, but are you allowing others in the body of Christ to meet your needs? Most of us would admit that it’s far more difficult to be the recipient of

other's benevolence than it is to be a benefactor. There's something about us that doesn't want to admit to others when we have a need. We often have a weak, unbiblical view of grace. Grace make us terribly uncomfortable. We don't mind showing grace to others but we don't want to be in a position where we think we owe something to someone for the kindness they have shown us. Maybe this is a part of the American mystique of self-reliance and rugged individualism, but it's antithetical to life in Christ and authentic Christian community. How many times have we robbed others of the blessing of giving simply because we didn't have the courage to let them know we needed their help? Paul's command to us is to

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:2)

My second question is "Are you showing those around you the same self-sacrificial love that God has shown you?" It is such a great joy for me to be part of a congregation that takes its mission seriously. It would be very easy for us to let the slogan "Loving God, Service People" be simply that, a slogan that looks good on the church letterhead but has no practical application. This is a loving fellowship of believers who not only assist the needy in our community but actively demonstrate Christ's love to each other within the body. Many people are involved in small groups who actively care and pray for one other. I hear stories of people gathering to pray for those facing a difficult health diagnosis. I hear of people providing meals to a family who's lost their job, of cars being loaned or donated outright, of groceries provided and anonymous gifts being given. When I first came to Rochester, I often heard people joke that because of the presence of the Mayo Clinic, "This is a great place to get sick." Well, I can also tell you more seriously that Autumn Ridge Church is a great place to face life's adversities,

because you won't be facing them alone. There are people here waiting to pray for you, care for you and help meet your needs. That's why we invite you to submit a Welcome Card every week, so we know how we can pray for you and meet your needs. Being involved in a small group is probably the best place to start. It's really true that we want to be the smallest big church in town.

So, the takeaway point from our study this morning is that if you are truly in a loving relationship with God you are going to mirror that love to others, especially to those in God's family. As the apostle Paul said:

...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal 6:10)

## Loving One Another - 1 John 4:11-18

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

### I. The exhortation to love (11-13)

- A. Love arises from obedience (11)
- B. Hate arises from jealousy (12-13)

Question: Does the world really hate us?

### II. The evidence of love (14-15)

- A. Love is evidence of a spiritual resurrection (14)
- B. Hate is evidence of spiritual death (14b-15)

Question: Is hate really equivalent to murder?

### III. The essence of love (16-18)

- A. Love is proven by self-sacrifice (16)
- B. Hate is revealed by social apathy (17)

Thoughts on 1 John 3:13. Does the world really hate us?

John uses the church as a symbol of righteousness and the world as a symbol of unrighteousness. In his day, the church and the world stood in distinct opposition to one another, both civilly and culturally. Things have greatly changed in 2000 years; righteousness and unrighteousness are as opposed to one another as ever but that the world and the church seem closer than ever. Is it still true to say that the world hates the church? Some thoughts to consider:

1. There are some churches that the world will never hate because they are entirely worldly in spirit. They are even respected by the world; they will never convert, startle or disturb the world.
2. A church that functions merely as a good social organization will remain invisible to the world. A church that never evangelizes or never confronts the injustices or immorality of society will never be hated by the world.
3. In a modern culture that emphasizes tolerance, any hatred shown the church will more likely be aimed at church systems than at individual Christians. However, there is little tolerance for believers who take an unpopular stand because of Christian principles.

4. No one wants to be hated, and the modern church spends much time discussing its “relevance” to a post-modern world, especially in discussions of culture, evangelism and worship practice. Was the relevance of the church a concern of the apostles? Is it a biblical concern? How do we balance cultural relevance and spiritual authenticity?
5. Even though there may be a more socially cordial relationship between the world and the church than in John’s day and a popularized, mythic, non-confrontational Jesus is admired by the world, the world is no more inclined to confession of sin and repentance than ever. If we are faithful in our message and convictions, there will be conflict with a world that refuses to admit to the rightful sovereignty of God.