

# Love One Another

1 John 3:11-24

## I. Introduction

- A. In Genesis 2 God created the man and said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” So, God created family. God created the family to be a blessing. Yet, right from the beginning the family relationships began to face problems. Eve sinned and shared it with her husband. Then turned on each other, placing blame.
1. Then in Genesis 4 their family strife spread to their children. The first sin after the garden was disrespect toward God in worship, but the second sin was hatred between brothers. Thus, loving God and loving others is the reversal of what lies at the root of sin.
  2. Cain’s hatred and murder of his brother Abel is used throughout Scripture as an example of why those who do evil hate those who live righteously. It explains the world’s persecution of God’s people (see Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51; Heb. 11:4; 12:24; Jude 11, in the N.T.).
  3. John uses the example of Cain to show the local church why they were being mistreated by former members who have abandoned the church and truth about Jesus (2:9-11; 2:19,26). These former members were trying to deceive the members of the church with what they thought was “superior” knowledge to the gospel the apostles taught. Those who didn’t accept their ideas they evidently mistreated.
  4. In this text, John reminds the church that they are to be characterized by “loving one another.” In fact, how one treats their fellow-believer is an indication of whether they are like Cain or Christ; a murder or a life-giver; condemned and abiding in Christ. John reveals the ethical test, loving the brethren, as a distinguishing mark of those who know God and have eternal life.
- B. Yes, some of the first family relationships caused problems; sin, blame, hatred and even murder. But, God created a new family in Jesus Christ. This family is His church. This family is to be committed to righteousness and love. We seek to be such a family. To do so, we must continually seek to grow in love for one another.
1. Proverbs 6:16–19 tells us seven things that God hates: *“haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”*
  2. In contrast, Romans 12 tells us that loving God’s children is an essential result of our salvation.  

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Rom. 12:9-13)

Peter likewise,

**22** Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, (1 Pet. 1:22)

C. We will consider this text in four sections.

First, a command: “love one another” (:11).

The first example, negative – Cain (:12-15);

The second example, positive – Christ (:16-18);

Lastly, the blessings of love are a great way to end the chapter (:19-24).

**Read 1 John 3:11-24.**

## II. Love One Another

- A. **Command: Love One Another (3:11).** The section begins with a command, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (3:11). This looks back to command Jesus gave the apostles in John 13:34,
- 34** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.  
**35** By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35; note: Jesus addresses the disciples as “Little children,” as John does in this letter.)

Jesus gives the apostles this command right after Judas has left their assembly to betray Jesus. The local church John writes to faces the same challenge. Some have left their number because they denied Jesus, thus they are abused. How should the church respond? Jesus and John say, “Loving each other is the sign that you belong to Jesus.”

1. *Love Is Our Family Trait.* Verse 11 begins, “*For this,*” referring to verse 10, where a disciple’s “*love for their brother*” is the mark of being a “*child of God.*” Since, “God is love,” and the work of Jesus on the cross is how we know love, it makes sense that those who are a part of God’s family will be characterized by love (1 John 4:8; 3:16).
2. *Love Is the Message We Heard.* In addition, loving each other is so essential to the gospel it is “*the message that you heard from the beginning*” (:11). This phrase is commonly used in 1 John to contrast the “deceivers” and “false teachers” who say the church needs some new, further revelation to know God. John tells the church they don’t need new revelation (see 1 John 2:24-26) to have full fellowship with God. The message they received was public and provable (1:1-4), and so it can be trusted. Fundamental to that saving message was the necessity to “*love one another.*”
3. *Love Is a Command.* By the way notice “*love one another*” is a command. It must be practiced without prejudice. John 13 begins with the phrase, “*Jesus loved them to the end,*” and that included Judas at the time (John 13:1). Since love is a command, it doesn’t depend upon our feelings, but doing what is best for the other person.

4. To help us see the importance and meaning of love, John now gives us two examples. The first is an example of a lack of brother love (:12-15). The second, an ultimate example of brotherly love (:16-18).

**B. Cain: The Lack of Brotherly Love (3:12-15). “not as Cain.”** Cain is held up as an example of a lack of brotherly love.

1. *The Example of Cain (:12).*

- a. *The Source of Brotherly Mistreatment.* The source of a lack of brotherly love is “*the evil one.*” The devil played a role in taking spiritual life from Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:1); he then played a role in taking physical life from Abel in the Field (Gen. 4:7). In Genesis 4 Cain showed resentment for God and jealousy toward his brother, and these attitudes first dwelled in the devil. The devil is the source of resentment, jealousy and hatred for righteousness. It will be helpful to see the devil behind these attitudes. They are not simply mistakes, or “reasonable responses given the circumstances.” No, they are the offspring of the devil.
- b. *The Action of Brotherly Mistreatment.* Cain’s anger toward God and his brother resulted in “*murder.*” Cain lost his love for Abel’s life and then he took Abel’s life. Sin escalates. What begins as jealousy, leads to bitterness, which leads to physical expressions of anger, even murder.
- c. *The Reason of Brotherly Mistreatment.* John asks, “*why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous*” (3:12). The truth of God is offensive to those who want to practice sin. Darkness is not content to simply tolerate the light. It must seek to destroy it, and destroy it through the dark means of hatred and violence.

- 1) After predicting the cross in John 3 Jesus gave the reason for why it would happen,

“the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.<sup>20</sup> For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.  
(John 3:19-20)

- 2) Peter said the persecution the church was the result of people considering righteousness as offensive.

<sup>3</sup> For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. <sup>4</sup> They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.  
(1 Pet. 4:3-4)

2. *The Experience of Christians (:13-15).* John now applies Cain’s example to the experience of the Christians.

- a. *Expect Hatred from the World (:13).* Cain’s treatment of Abel is held up as a pattern of how the world will always treat those who seek to live righteous lives before God. They will be hated and murdered. This should not “*surprise us.*” (3:13). Jesus warned His disciples that the world would hate them.

<sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)

<sup>14</sup> I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. <sup>2</sup> They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. <sup>3</sup> And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. <sup>4</sup> But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them. (John 16:1-4)

In the context of 1 John we should ask, “Does “the world” refer only to those who have no faith in Christ?” It seems like “the world” is used in 1 John as a mindset, “*those who love the world*” (2:15). It seems to refer to those who left the local church, “*went out from us*” (2:19). They may still claim to follow God, but they are living by the world’s standards. Those who follow the world, whatever the call themselves, will always hate those living righteously.

- b. *Determine to Love the Brethren (14)*. “*We*” in verse 14 is in contrast with “*the world*.” It describes the children of God who are determined to love the brethren.
- 1) *Love Is Evidence of Spiritual Life*. Expressing love toward the saints is evidence that God’s life, eternal life is ours. “*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers*” (3:14). When Satan is working in a person’s life, like Cain, it results in bringing death into those around them. However, those who are filled with the Spirit, bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is, “*Love*” (Gal. 5:22). Conversely, when a disciple “*hates his brother,*” no “*eternal life*” abides in him (3:15).
  - 2) *Hatred Is Murder*. While love is evidence that spiritual life is present, hatred is evidence that murder is present. In this case, hatred is the inner desire for someone to be removed; this is just an act away from murdering someone to remove them physically. Jesus taught the connection between hatred and murder in the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother will be subject to judgment. (Matt. 5:21-22)

We cannot hide behind an attitude, harbored in our heart in bitterness toward a fellow disciple and say, “I haven’t done anything wrong to them.” Yes, Jesus says, you have already sinned against them. You murdered them in your heart.

B. **Christ: The Definition of Brotherly Love (3:16-18).** While Cain was controlled by the devil and killed his brother, Jesus humbled himself and *“became like His brethren in all things”* (Heb. 2:17), to save us from the devil’s bondage. While Cain is the pattern for the world’s attitude toward the righteous, Jesus is the pattern for the church’s attitude toward the righteous—love not hate.

1. *Love Is Laying Down Your Life for Others (:16).* Jesus is the definition of love, *“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us”* (3:16). Jesus first laid aside His glory as God to live among us, then he laid aside that life to die for our sins. This is more than just a moment of sacrifice, but a life of sacrifice for our good. This is love. Love is more than a grand act; it is a daily act of laying aside our lives to do what is best for another.
2. *We Must Love Like Christ (:16).* The love of Jesus is to be more than an amazement to us. It is to be our model. *“we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers”* (:16). This is what Jesus taught in John 13:34-35, *“Love as I loved you.”* This is a high and perfect model. None of us will live up to it. We will need constant forgiveness and patience as we strive to imitate it. Yet, it is our goal.
3. *Example of Christ Like Love (:17-18).* John doesn’t want us to think that loving like Jesus refers to the remote opportunity of literally dying for someone. So, he gives us an example of what Christ’s love looks like. It looks like helping a brother in need. To express Christ’s like love requires four things.
  - a. *Use the World’s Goods.* John refers to our possessions in an interesting way. They are not our goods, but *“the world’s goods.”* Perhaps he is describing their temporary nature. The word John uses for *“goods”* here is “bios” and it is often translated “life.” So, John could be saying, use the life you have here on earth to love.
  - b. *See the Needs of Others.* *“sees his brother in need,”* many of our opportunities to show love are missed because we are not seeing the need. Love begins by opening our eyes.
  - c. *Open Your Heart.* *“yet closes his heart against him.”* When we see the need there is a selfish temptation to close our heart to that need. We can give many high-sounding excuses for not meeting the need, but if we are not moved by need, we cannot love. The O.T. background for this illustration is found in Deuteronomy 15:7-11

<sup>7</sup> “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, <sup>8</sup> but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup> Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,’ and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the Lord against you, and it become sin among you. <sup>10</sup> You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. <sup>11</sup> For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.’ (Deut. 15:7-11)

- d. *Practically Meet the Need.* God's love is not found in the person whose heart and eyes are not open, to personally and practically help those brethren in need. Love cannot stay as merely "*word and talk,*" it must be expressed in "*deed and truth.*"

C. ***Confidence: The Blessings of Brotherly Love (3:19-24).*** Many blessings of brotherly love have already been expressed. It is evidence that we have "*life, eternal life*" in Christ (3:14,15), it helps those in need (3:17). But now, John says that our love for one another is what gives us confidence our relationship with God is genuine. Similarly, in 1 John 2:21-29, believing the truth about Jesus and living righteously is what allows disciples to "*not shrink from him in shame at his coming*" (2:28). Just as passing the *doctrine* test, and the *moral* test, gives assurance of our relationship with Jesus, now passing the *social* test of loving our brethren also gives us confidence.

1. *The Court of the Heart (:19-21).* John first sets up what might be thought of as a courtroom. The prosecutor is "our heart." The defended is "ourselves." And the Judge is "God." The subject of the trial is, "Do I love the brethren?"
  - a. *The Assured Heart (:19, 21).* One possible outcome is my heart "*assures*" me that I'm loving the brethren. Before the Judge my heart stands and says, "*I do not condemn this man. He loves Your people.*" This shows that we are "*of the truth,*" not "*of the evil one*" (contrast 3:12, 19).
  - b. *The Condemned Heart (:20).* The other outcome is my heart "condemns" me. It stands before the Judge and says, "You know all. Therefore, you know this man does not love Your people. He hates his brother. He is not caring for those in need." We cannot fool the Judge. So, we stand condemned. This becomes motivation for loving one another as we should (which fits the logic of Deut. 15 above).

[Alternately, some read verse 20 as saying, "When our heart judges us, it knows that we do not love the brethren as we should. There would be no hope for us, except that God's judgment is greater than our heart's judgement. He will forgive. This would be a specific application of 1 John 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" ]

The definition and example of love is Jesus, so we will never measure up perfectly. Our hearts will always find a reason to condemn us, that we don't measure up to that standard. However, perfection in love is not John's point. It is love and service in contrast to hatred. We will never love the brethren perfectly, but we must never abuse them or hate them in our thoughts, words or actions. We constantly need God's forgiveness, for we will never love perfectly. But striving to love as Jesus loved is our goal.

2. *The Blessings of a Loving Heart (:22-24).* When we, in all good conscience, love God's people there are many blessings that result.
  - a. *Peace.* First is peace of mind, or peace from our heart. Our heart is not restless about our lack of love. It knows God's love and it knows that we are seeking to love like Him, thus we have fellowship with Him.
  - b. *Prayer.* This fellowship with God, then leads to talking to God in prayer. When we love like Jesus loves then we can pray powerful prayers. Then our prayers will not be selfish or worldly. They will be filled with the needs of

others and eternal, kingdom concerns. To this *social* test “*love one another*” (:23), John now adds the other two test, the *doctrinal* test, “*that we believe in the name of His Son*” (:23), and the *moral* test, “*because we keep is commandments and do what pleases Him,*” as necessary prerequisites to answered prayer. This ensures that prayer is used for God’s purposes.

- c. *Presence*. The final blessing of “*loving one another*” is a believer “*abides in God, and God in him.*” (:24). To have fellowship with God we must have loving fellowship with His people. His command is to “love one another” and those who abide in His commands, abide in God. God seals this fellowship by giving us “The Spirit.” The Spirit gives us “life” and is the seal we belong to God (Eph. 1:13-14).

“*The Spirit*” is introduced here as a link word to what John will talk about in chapter 4. There the Spirit is contrasted with “*the spirits*” of the antichrist who are not confessing Jesus is from God. The Spirit teaches us to love one another, and to believe the right things about Jesus.

- d. If we want to be effective in serving the purposes of God in this world through prayer we must be people who love each other!