

That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

Love One Another

October 18th, 2020

1 John 3:11-24

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 1 John 3:11. I mentioned two weeks ago that 1 John 3:10 was a sort of “hinge verse”; it brought one section to a close and it served to introduce another. In that verse the Apostle said:

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10 ESV)

So two weeks ago we were talking about how REAL BELIEVERS are RENOUNCING SIN. A real Christian isn't perfect, but he or she IS WAGING WAR ON REMAINING SIN and now here in the hinge verse John tells us that, in addition, a real believer is LOVING his brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the topic that we turn our attention to today.

Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 11:

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. ¹⁴ We

know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

¹⁹ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (1 John 3:11–24 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

You will recall that this entire letter was occasioned by the crisis in the early church. A whole group of people SPLIT off from the main body and started believing things and teaching things that were not in line with the historic Christian Gospel. They were saying that they were the real believers and that the folks who had stayed behind were not. So HOW CAN WE KNOW? That was the question and you can hear echoes of that question in the answer that John is providing. You KNOW that you are the real believers because real believers are waging war on remaining sin – that was the argument in verses 4-10 – and now here John adds a further bit of evidence. You know who the real believers are because real believers are loving one another.

Real Believers Love One Another

In the opening verse John says that this teaching goes all the way back to the beginning – to the Gospel that they first believed. We assume that John is referring to the Gospel he wrote for them which records Jesus as saying in chapter 13:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34–35 ESV)

By the way, we totally didn’t plan this, but it turns out that this passage that we are dealing with today in 1 John is the PERFECT follow up to the message that was preached LAST SUNDAY on the Lord’s Supper because almost everything John says here in 1 John 3:11-24 is an expansion on things he first taught in his Gospel in chapters 13-15 – all of which come from The Last Supper that Jesus shared with his Apostles. At the Last Supper he commanded them to LOVE ONE ANOTHER. At the Last Supper when he gave them the one loaf he told them that they were the one true family of God.

Now, as I said last week, it is almost like we have an internal defence mechanism as contemporary Christians – and particularly as Canadian Christians – that keeps us from receiving the true impact of what Jesus is actually saying here. Jesus consistently taught that in his BODY he was creating the NEW FAMILY OF GOD. So the people you share the table with ARE YOUR ULTIMATE FAMILY – just as they are HIS ULTIMATE FAMILY – Jesus said that too. When his biological mother and his biological half-brothers came to retrieve him for some important thing that they were all invested in, he said:

“Who are my mother and my brothers?”³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” (Mark 3:33–34 ESV)

I’m already with my ultimate family. I’m already in my BUBBLE RIGHT HERE, Jesus said.

REAL BELIEVERS understand that. Real believers love one another – that’s the central message of this passage. There are 3 sub-sections in this passage, following roughly the paragraph arrangement in the ESV Bible. They are as follows. In verses 11-15 John is saying that:

1. Real believers love one another and are hated and persecuted by the world

Once again, commentaries assume here that John is referring to another thing that Jesus said during the Last Supper Discourse. In chapter 15 he said:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” (John 15:18–20 ESV)

So in The Last Supper Discourse Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another and he warned them that they would be hated by the world.

Those are the forces that have historically FORMED the church into a cohesive body.

There is a push and there is a pull.

Real believers are DRAWN to one another. God empowers that which he commands. He told us to love one another and so he causes our spirit to reach out in love toward other believers. This is why you can FEEL like you have known a fellow believer your whole life, even though you only met them a few hours ago or days ago. This is why you can make friends INSTANTLY with other believers in other cultures – even when you don’t speak the same language. There is a DIVINE FACTOR TO THAT. There is a magnetism as the SEED OF GOD inside you recognizes and is attracted to the SEED OF GOD in your brothers and sisters. You want to be with your family – that’s the pull.

And there is a push too. There is a constant feeling of discomfort in the world. And there is a constant sense of antagonism FROM the world. Cain killed Abel – the Seed of the Serpent HATED and MURDERED the Seed of the Woman – just as was prophesied in Genesis 3:15. God said to the serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV)

So there will be constant WARFARE – constant enmity – between the people of God and the people of the DEVIL. The seed of the woman is the line of promise – it is those people who are looking forward to the salvation of God – or in the New Testament we would say, the people who

are looking BACK on the salvation of God. Those people are in constant warfare with the people of the devil. The people in the dark HATE the people in the light BECAUSE their deeds are evil. So when you don't JOIN THEM they feel judged! John had written to them about this in his Gospel. He said:

“the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.” (John 3:19–20 ESV)

That's the way it has always been – that's WHY CAIN killed Abel:

“And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.” (1 John 3:12 ESV)

They hate you, John says, because you make them feel guilty.

They hate you because when you say that you believe in marriage it makes them feel guilty for sleeping around.

They hate you because when you say that you are pro-life it makes them feel guilty for sacrificing babies on the altar of convenience and career.

They hate you because when you say that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life – it makes them feel guilty for continuing in their rebellion against their Creator.

Everything you say and everything you believe makes them want to kill you! And one day they will, John says. Do you remember the vision of the two witnesses in Revelation 11? Many scholars understand that as referring to the church – a fully revived church in the last days operating in the power and boldness of Moses and Elijah – and the world HATES that church. Listen to how the prophecy ends:

“the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. ⁹For three

and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb,¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth.” (Revelation 11:7–10 ESV)

So the WORLD – symbolically called Sodom and Egypt – the culture opposed to God – is going to HATE the church and the beast is going to make war on the church and kill IT (singular) and the people who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange gifts because these Christians – this powerful witnessing, praying, prophesying church – has been a torment to wicked, unbelieving people everywhere.

That’s how this story ends, John says.

So love one another. You’re going to need each other, because the deeper you get into this trajectory, the more you are going to be hated by the world.

The second thing John says is that:

2. Real believers love generously and sacrificially in imitation of the love of God in Christ

He says that in verses 16-18.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.¹⁷ But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16–18 ESV)

Of course that is very similar to what James, the brother of Jesus said to his people. He said:

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (James 2:15–16 ESV)

Christian love isn't a LIP LOVE, it isn't a SENTIMENT LOVE, it isn't a THEORETICAL LOVE – it is A BODY AND BLOOD LOVE because that is how God has loved us in the person and work of Christ.

We need to be willing to die for each other – but most of the time that won't be necessary – but we can imitate the sacrificial love of Jesus by being willing to give up our PROPERTY – OUR MONEY – in order to care for the poor and the needy in our midst.

That's the call – but responding to that call goes against just about every natural instinct of the human heart. That's the third thing John is saying here:

3. Real believers war against their inner tendency toward isolation and meanness of spirit

Look at verses 19-23. Grammatically speaking this is the only complicated part of the whole passage. Notice the opening phrase “by this we shall know” – that is of course, the organizing principle of the entire letter. John is trying to help them KNOW who the real Christians are. Real Christians are the ones renouncing sin and real Christians are the ones loving one another – but here he warns us that this won't be easy. So if we actually do it, we will KNOW that we are truly Christians.

Look at verses 19-20:

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and **reassure our heart** before him; ²⁰for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. (1 John 3:19–20 ESV)

Now in English it almost sounds like John has changed topics mid-verse there. It sounds like he is saying that God is more authoritative than the human conscience – and that is true – but what in the world does that have to do with the fact that real believers love one another? So unless John has had a stroke here, we must not be hearing this right. In Greek the word translated here as “heart” never means “conscience” – there is a word for “conscience” and the NT uses it all the time, so if John meant “conscience” he could have said “conscience” but he doesn't. So what is he saying? The Pillar New Testament Commentary is very helpful here, it says:

“the readers must ‘persuade their hearts in the presence of God’ ... so that they do not succumb to the meanness in their hearts and refuse to offer material assistance. This persuasion is to be undertaken whenever our hearts condemn us, that is, whenever their hearts object to legitimate calls upon their generosity when they are in fact in a position to respond.”¹

Are you hearing that?

John is saying basically that there is a battle going on inside the heart of every real believer. The SEED OF GOD in them reaches out in compassion toward other believers – but their fallen nature still inclines toward meanness of spirit and self-preservation. We want to keep what is ours. We want to look after ourselves. So we argue against generosity. And John is saying: “You know you are a real believer if you can press through that and do that which is completely contrary to fallen human nature. If you can give to people who can’t pay you back; if you can help people who have nothing to offer you in return; if you can love people whom you have no genetic, biological, inherent connection to – well that is all the proof you ought to need that you are the children of God.”

David Jackman says here:

“Every time we come across a genuine case of a Christian in need, our love for God is tested.”²

And according to John – GOD HIMSELF is watching to see how we respond.

Look at the end of verse 20:

“whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.” (1 John 3:20 ESV)

God cares about the outcome of that battle in your heart. He has invested in that battle, remember according to verse 9 THE SEED OF GOD IS IN YOU. He planted something in your heart which

¹Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 141.

²David Jackman, *The Message of John’s Letters*, ed. John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today*. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 101.

ought to TIP YOU in favour of impossible generosity and care towards your fellow believer. God is stronger than the fallen instincts of your heart.

So a real believer is going to win that argument.

A real believer is going to love his brothers and sisters in Christ – and that’s going to please God who will then move closer to them which will in term result in more answers to prayer and a greater sense of the power and presence of the Spirit in our midst.

That’s the conclusion in verse 24:

“And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.” (1 John 3:24 ESV)

So zooming out here, and looking at chapter 3 as a whole we might say that the more we renounce sin and the more we love one another, the closer we will be to God, the more confident we will be in prayer and the more we will the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit – does that sound good to you?

That sounds really good to me, so how do we get going on this? Because in my experience there are far too many Christians who are loving everyone in general and no one in particular. Stephen Smalley says here:

“It is easier to love “mankind” as a whole and in theory than (say) to help a particular “brother” who needs, and deserves our cash.”³

So how do we put feet on this? How do we move from useless, theoretical, general love – to the kind of love that John is talking about here? Let me suggest 3 things we need to do immediately.

Toward A “Particular” Type Of Love:

1. We need to take membership more seriously

³ Stephen Smalley, *1,2,3 John* in Word Biblical Commentary Volume 51, (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1984), 197.

Here's what I mean by that – whenever I see a person in need my mind starts asking questions like: is this person really a Christian or are they just saying that to increase the amount of money they think they are going to get from me?

I'll be honest with you, as a pastor, I wrestle with this. Every person who comes into my office asking for money TELLS ME that they are a real believer. "I'm a Christian too pastor, I've been to your church before, I've been to some other churches here in town as well. I'm a real Christian and therefore you are responsible for meeting my needs."

But here's the thing – I've been scammed so many times and I've had people tell me that they are Christians SO MANY TIMES – only to discover that they were not.

So you get jaded.

And that makes it harder to PERSUADE YOUR HEART in the direction of generosity and sacrificial giving. And I'm just telling you that this whole process would be a lot easier if North American Evangelicals took church membership more seriously.

That way if a person said: "I'm a Christian", I could say "To which church do you belong?" Is there anyone else in the universe who thinks you are a Christian, because I don't know you. And I don't know what you are going to use this money for. But if you are a member of a church then I can call them and we can make a plan and we can be sure that there will be follow up and accountability and that will make it easier for us to persuade our hearts to be impossibly and sacrificially generous.

This is a simple thing – but I will tell you, I think it is a game changer. Because we've got to know: "WHO ARE MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS AND MY SISTERS?" Because if everybody is then nobody is. We need to know to whom our DEEPEST AFFECTIONS and COMMITMENTS BELONG.

The second thing we need to do is take leadership and management more seriously.

2. We need to take leadership more seriously

I know this FEELS unspiritual but it is not. In the early church, in Acts 6 the church recognized that they needed to invent another layer of leadership to manage the benevolence ministry – the love ministry – of the church. There were arguments about who should be getting what and how that should be delivered – and it threatened to suck the Apostles right out of their primary responsibility – which was to preach and teach the Word of God. So they INVENTED a layer of middle management so that people could be assured that things were being handled properly.

It is easier to ask people to give generously when you have a well-managed system in place for benevolent care. It takes away an argument against giving generously and sacrificially to our brothers, sisters and mothers who are in genuine need.

Now, we had a system just like that in the works before this pandemic hit and knocked everything we were building to the ground. So rebuilding that is at the very top of my post-COVID19 to do list. We are going to build again what this pandemic blew down. We are going to do this because this has been our Achille's heel as a church for the last 15 years. We need some kind of deacon level management structure to ensure that we are loving each other WELL, WISELY and EFFICIENTLY – and we were almost there, and we will get there again, very soon. We're committed to that. We need to take that seriously if we are going to make progress on this issue.

And then thirdly and lastly,

3. We need to take physical presence more seriously

I've waited a long time to say this, but I'm saying it now – it is time for you to come back to church.

There may be 10 or 20 or even 30 people in our congregation who have a legitimate medical reason for not coming back to church – but for the rest of us; it is time. It is past time. We are sitting 6 feet apart. We are wearing masks. We are doing the 2-cup stack – so there is MINIMAL RISK to your physical health.

Not ZERO RISK – I’m not saying that. But on the scale of centuries I would imagine that the risk that we face now is very near to the lowest percentile in human history. In the 4th century going to church might result in you being fed to a lion. Well, COVID19 is not nothing, but it’s not that.

So it’s time for you to come back to church.

And I’ll be so bold as to say this – if your reason for not coming back to church is that you REFUSE to wear the mask, you refuse to be told, you’re not a sheep, you’re an independent thinker - then I’ll be honest with you, you need to get over yourself because a 4x6 piece of cloth should not be able to knock a REAL BELIEVER out of one of the fundamental aspects of the Christian life.

PUSH THROUGH.

Do what you need to do to be WITH your mother and your sister and your brother in the Christian faith – because PUSHING THROUGH, John says, is what gives a person confidence that they ARE IN FACT the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

So win that argument with your heart.

It’s time for you to come back to church.

And if it takes 2 services to fit everybody in until we can get back to our full capacity again in here – we’ll do that. We’ll do what it takes because the people out there need to see us taking care of each other in here. This is not optional. This is part and parcel of our witness to the world.

Jesus said:

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35 ESV)

Thanks be to God! Let’s pray together.