

D. LOVE ONE ANOTHER (3:11-24)

¹¹This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹²Do 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. ¹³Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

¹⁶This 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. ¹⁷If 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? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

These next fourteen verses give us one of the most powerful expressions of love that you will find. John returns to the role of love as proof that we are walking in the light. He reminds them that this is a central part of the message they had received in the beginning.

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

This part of his message to them is connected with the previous statements about who is a son of righteousness and who is a son of the devil. He begins verse 11 with the words, o{ti au{th (*hoti hautē*, “because this” is the message from the beginning), indicating the direct relation of the two thoughts. In other words, it is because it is connected to the message from the beginning, *then we should love one another*.

3:12 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.

When we fulfill this commandment to love one another, we must be careful that our lives are not like that of Cain (see Gen 4:2-16) who committed the first murder by killing his own brother. John is showing that Cain did not love his brother, as evidenced by his cold-blooded murder of Abel. The situation between them arose because the two brothers had offered sacrifices to God; God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's offering. We are not certain why Abel's was acceptable but Cain's wasn't. John said the reason he murdered Abel was because **his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous**. What he did that his actions were evil, we do not know. Was it because Cain offered from the produce of the field while Abel offered a blood sacrifice from his flocks? Was it because only Abel offered his sacrifice "by faith" (Heb 11:4)? We are not told, but for some reason Cain was rejected because he did not properly obey God. John used the illustration of Cain to show the depth of love that we should have for our brothers. Cain's hatred for his brother illustrates a life without righteousness.

3:13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

It is likely that the Christians of this time were enduring hatred and mistreatment by those "on the cutting edge," as it were, of Christian thinking. These Gnostics were probably making fun of the other Christians for not going along with their false teaching. Certainly the "world" was rejecting this new belief called the "Way," and John is warning them not to be discouraged. Even in our day, we should not "be surprised if the world hates" us; neither should those of John's day have been surprised if they hated the Christians. The same situation exists in our world (and in *their* world) as existed with Cain and Abel. If the world is evil and God's children are righteous, why should it be surprising that the world hated them?

3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

John is showing in these verses that love is the *evidence of* righteousness, not the *basis of* spiritual living. Earlier John stated that to be righteous, one must obey the commandments (commands) of God. Now, he equates righteousness with loving one's brother. In verse 14, hating one's brother is identified as murder. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says the same thing: "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," and ultimately this can lead to hell (Matt 5:21-22).

3:15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Hatred of our brother is identified as murder, and murderers have no place in heaven. This is altogether reasonable, because the one who destroys life has set himself against eternal life.

3:16 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.

This verse is obviously a comparison, in John's mind, of Cain and Christ. Cain showed his feelings by murdering his brother. Jesus shows his love to us by laying down his life for us. Here John gives us a definition of "love." He defines it by giving an example of what it does. We know love, he says, because **Jesus . . . laid down his life for us**. Love takes place when we become "other-centered" rather than "self-centered." In his Gospel, John quotes Jesus as saying, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only^{#7} Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The extent of Jesus' love is also seen in John 15:12-13, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." And Jesus demonstrated the power of his love in laying down his life for all of his friends (or, disciples). Marshall has this comment, "It [this passage in 1 John 3:16] indicates that one is prepared to give up one's own life in order that others may live. Love means saying 'No' to one's own life so that somebody else may live. Finally, it should be noted that the laying down of life is done for the benefit of the other person."^{#8} John then makes this action of Jesus even more personal to his readers by saying that we too should lay down our lives for each other.

3:17 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?

John now illustrates the extent to which our love should reach. It is a demanding requirement! In our day (especially in highly developed nations like America) most of us have far more than we actually need to sustain ourselves. John demands that we lay down part of that which we have to give to a needy brother. This is how *koinōnia* (*koinōnia*, "fellowship, oneness") should work in our lives. The early church "shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32) with each other. We certainly realize that this was a special situation when people had come from throughout the world, were converted to Jesus Christ, and stayed on in Jerusalem to learn more about this new "Way" they had just found. Certainly there is a kind of spiritual practicality that we must be able to use in applying this to our lives. May God forbid that we use this "spiritual practicality" inappropriately for our own selfish gain, but each person should examine his/her life to decide how we apply this "definition" of love to our own spiritual lives.

3:18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

This brief section shows how we can have assurance that we are acceptable to our Lord. Our love must not be merely for show. We must do more than just “talk a good love.” I knew a farmer many years ago who could “talk a good crop” for the next year during the winter months. But when it came time to carry out his plans, they were not very successful. Many are this way with their love. They talk about and tell how great their love is. But it is only **love with words or tongue**, as John charges. We must put our love into action. Only then will it be love **in truth**.

3:19 This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence 3:20 whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Our love helps us to know whether we belong to the truth. John tells us that when we know that our hearts condemn us, our love is insufficient. Since God is greater than our hearts, then he can know who we are and what we are. Let us not try to deceive God by having only a “love with words or tongue.” God knows our hearts. We can **set our hearts at rest in his presence** if we are obedient to his command. We know that we “belong to the truth” when our consciences are at ease in his presence.

3:21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God

J.W Roberts gives a very good overview of verses 21-23. He writes, “As a conclusion to his second major part of the epistle, John mentions three things which seem unrelated to each other but which tie to the major themes of the epistle. First he expands the mention of the believer’s confidence before God to include the answer to prayer (vss. 21, 22). Next, he combines the two themes of believing in Jesus as the Son of God and loving one another as the commandment of Christ (vs. 23). Lastly he confirms the fellowship of those who do the commandments by their having the Holy Spirit (vs. 24).”^{#9} In verse 19, John discusses “hearts at rest” and hearts that “condemn.” If our hearts are in tune with God’s heart, then our consciences are at rest. This is what John is saying here. If **our hearts do not condemn us**, then we are “in tune” with God and we have confidence before God. How can one have confidence before God when that heart is impure?

3:22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.

Although the impure, or pure, heart is a very important element of Christian living, this was not the major reason John mentions it here. He mentions it here to show the relationship we have with God. **We will receive from him anything we ask.** Why can we be confident that we will receive what we ask? **Because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.** God will be responsive to his children, and his true children will be obedient to him and will make him proud because we seek to please him. This is the essence of how we keep a clean conscience — to remain in his fellowship.

3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

As if his readers have forgotten what his commands are, John tells them. God's command is singular: to believe Jesus Christ and to love one another. It would appear from John's statement that you can't have one without the other. Many in our world would have us believe that all that is necessary to be a good Christian is to just be filled with love for one another, but this is not what John is saying here or elsewhere. The love must be coupled with faith in Jesus Christ. It is not true that anyone who shows love for others is a Christian. Again, it should be emphasized that an idle, inactive faith can be a damnable thing to have. Faith, to be acceptable to God, has to be accompanied with works of obedience (see the first and last sentences of the book of Romans. James warns that even the "demons believe . . . and shudder" (James 2:19). So it is not enough to believe and do nothing about it. Nor can we have love without doing something. Love is one of the greatest motivators we have. You cannot truly love without demonstrating it. So, when John summarizes the meaning of the commands of Jesus, he is stressing the deepest involvement with the Lord that we can have.

3:24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them.

One of John's favorite phrases (and certainly, one of Paul's) is "in him." Both of these apostles use this to describe the relationship that we have with Jesus. We are "in him" and he is "in us," as we can see from the first part of this verse. It sounds like this is not possible, for how can I be "in him" and he be "in me" at the same time? This is another way of saying that if we have the proper relationship with Jesus, then we have a common identity. This language reminds us of John's use of such terms as "abide in him," the union and fellowship (*koinōnia*) that we share with Jesus. We are told in John's Gospel that "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (John 14:23-24). John insists that obedience to the commandments of God is the condition for having communion with him. This

relationship was undoubtedly pointed to the Gnostics who said that it is impossible for man to come into a communion or direct fellowship with God. This was because God is spiritual and mankind is material.

And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

How do we know that we have fellowship and communion with God? **We know it by the Spirit he gave us.** This is the same Spirit that Jesus promised he would send after he left his disciples. “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). God did not leave us alone when Jesus returned to heaven; we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Consider These as You Read 1 John 3:11-24

1. What is the relation of command to love (___1John 2__3:11) and to God as light (___1John 2__1:5) since both are presented as summary of the divine message?
2. How does the first murder demonstrate the effect of hate on the one hating?
3. Can a Christian ever be liked by the world? Explain. (Compare 1 John 3:13 and Acts 2:47.)
4. When do Christians pass from death to life?
5. How can one be a murderer without killing anyone?
6. What is the relationship of love to need?
7. How do one’s actions prove or disprove one’s claim to divine sonship?
8. Should a Christian ever feel guilty to the point of self-condemnation?
9. Why are so many prayers seemingly unanswered?
10. What is Christian behavior in matters where there is no express command from God?
11. How does the experience of answered prayer have any bearing on John’s argument that Jesus is indeed the Christ?
12. How does the habit of believing Christ and loving our brothers affirm the deity of Christ?

13. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives affirm the deity of Christ?

Questions for Review of 1 John 3:11-24

1. The second summary of the message of the incarnation in 1 John 3:11 is _____ .
2. It is the nature of the life which we have in Christ to become a source of _____ to others.
3. This is accomplished when we _____ .
4. How does the murder of Abel by Cain demonstrate that the world is prone to hate those who practice righteousness?
5. The confrontation of righteousness by unrighteousness *normally* results in _____ .
6. Because love is obedience to God it is also _____ .
7. When does a Christian “pass from death to life?”
8. Do we love because we have eternal life, or do we have eternal life because we love?
9. Hate is the absence of _____ just as _____ is the absence of light.
10. The word translated “hate” in 1 John 3:15 means _____ .
11. Failure to love is proof of the absence of _____ .
12. How does the world become aware of love as we know it in Christ?
13. How do we demonstrate divine love in such a way that it is recognizable?
14. Just as he brought eternal life in the presence of our need, so we are to give in the presence of temporal needs.
15. Does giving what we can afford demonstrate divine love? Explain.
16. Many will be surprised in the judgment, who expect to be saved, because they have not learned to give rather than _____ .

17. How may we have assurance before God, even when our hearts condemn us?
18. Explain the statement, “No Christian has any right to a guilt complex.”
19. One of the greatest blessings of the Christian life is realized forgiveness. Explain this statement in light of 1 John 3:20.
20. The only basis upon which one’s heart can fail to condemn him is _____ .
21. The experience of answered prayer is evidence of _____ according to 1 John 3:22.
22. What conditions must be present in our lives in order to pray effectively?
23. Why does the term “father” not suggest authority to us today?
24. Which is more important, the question, “Who is Jesus?” Or our personal belief in the answer, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God?”
25. _____ is still the only hope of healing the divisions caused by false teaching.
26. How does the anointing of the Spirit demonstrate that we are in the Christ?