

A Picture Of Love

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[0 : 00] 1 John.

We're looking at verses 11 through 24 of chapter 3. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

We should not be like Cain, who was the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brothers righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.

We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

[1 : 19] 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? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have the confidence before God. And whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

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. Whoever keeps his commandments and 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. Let's pray. Lord, this morning we are confronted with the reality that we do not love as we ought.

[2 : 29] That we confess that we know the love of God, but we fail to love one another. Lord, speak to us through your word. Convict us and remind us that we should be the most loving of all because of what you have done through your Son.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I apologize, I've been a little sick. So if I cough a lung, I apologize. This morning we're taking a little break, as I mentioned, from the story of the judges.

So it's not as crazy, or is it? If you follow along with the Old Testament reading, there's some craziness going on there in Genesis chapter 4. But in 1 John, we're talking about love.

And that contrast between the crazy of Genesis 4 and the love that we see in 1 John is evident. And today it seems timely that we're talking about love.

No, this wasn't pre-planned. Here's your clue. Valentine's Day is this week. But this picture of love that we have in the scripture begs kind of the question, what is love?

[3 : 43] Does it look like Valentine's Day? And, you know, those little cards that you put in the slot on the edge of your desk if you're a kid? And candy? Is that love? Is it flowers and chocolate?

Is that love? Is it my favorite bumper sticker that I see around is dog is love. Is that love? Because that certainly says that it's love. Maybe if it's not man's best friend that's a picture of love.

Is it Nicholas Sparks and all of his romance novels tying together the scenes of North Carolina? Is that love? Is it a picture from the notebook where those people are kissing in the rain?

Is that love? Is it a friend meeting each other on the battlefield miles from home, having not seen each other in years?

Fighting for what they've left behind? Is it their love of country and their love for each other? Is that love? It's no less than love.

[4 : 42] Is it a wedding day where a young bride is so smitten with her husband and is so excited about what is to come?

Not just that day of dancing and music and party and all those people there? Is that love? Is it that same bride years later when she is at the funeral of her beloved?

And there's no one there. There's no dancing and there's no music. In fact, it's snowing and there's nobody even in attendance except for the officiant.

Is that love? What is love? Even when I ask that question, some of you immediately respond with that 90s song, right?

What is love, baby, don't hurt me? Is that actually what love is? I don't know. Certainly no less than not hurting one another. But it's a very important question, not just for this week, but because this text addresses it.

[5 : 45] We have all these images that swirl in our minds about love and what it is and what it should look like. We know that it's important. We know that it's important even from this text.

There's kind of a preamble that precedes this section, and it happens in verse 10. It says, 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. So that we know it's important. John's telling us it's important from this text because it's one of the distinguishing marks between those of the children of this world or the children of the devil and the children of God.

The mark is, do we love one another? Do we love, does he love his brother? So it's important, of course, not just because it's Valentine's Day this week.

It's important because it's a mark of what a true Christian is. That's the question that keeps popping up in 1 John. Do I know that if I'm a Christian?

[6 : 52] How do I know, though? How do I know that I have been saved? How do I know that I'm abiding with him and have eternal life? It's a question that some of us have.

How do I know in my darkest moments that I have faith in Christ? John answers that for us. He says, do you have love for your brother?

This morning, the driving force behind that question of what is love is the idea that a true Christian truly loves. A true Christian truly loves.

And as we look at that, we're going to do it in three ways. First is we're going to look at what love is not. What true love is not. Then what true love is.

And then the true effects of love. So what true love is not and what it is and the effects of true love. The first chunk of our text this morning deals with that call for the Christian to love.

[7 : 55] But it says, love, but don't be like Cain. That seems obvious, right? Verse 12 says this. We should not be like Cain, who was the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous. Now remember, this comes right after the fall. There's so much anticipation about what that next generation is going to be like.

We've had this monumental shift in God's kind of organization or the organization of humanity. And we don't know what's going to happen next. And what do we have? It's the same kind of stuff in Judges.

Murder, blood spilt, and hatred. And there's so much sadness. Genesis 4 says this.

And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering. But for Cain and his offering, he had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face fell.

[8 : 54] And the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face falling? If you do well, will you not be accepted? If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.

And its desire is contrary to you. But you must rule over it. And Cain spoke to Abel, his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother, Abel, and killed him.

At first glance, it's kind of a tough story. And if we're not careful, we get in this dilemma of like, why has God spurned Cain? And why has he chosen Abel?

But we see it subtly in the question that the Lord asked Cain. If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if that wasn't clear enough, Hebrews helps us here.

It says that by faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. And Cain then is angry that his sacrifice wasn't accepted by God.

[9 : 53] But what is the condition of acceptance, right? It's by faith. And then he gets angry and then he murders his brother. That's surely what true love is not.

It's not hatred. It's not murder. John appears in these next couple of verses to take a pause and make some comments about this intense battle between good and evil, between love and hate and what they actually are.

However, he's making a connection for us between love and hate. Or he's maybe drawing a difference for us. The difference between love and hate is the result of that sin.

And he does this in light of the contrast of a Christian who's called to love his brother. And when he does, he will not win the admiration of the world.

Instead, it's this admonition, hey, a warning, if you will, that if you love, the world's going to hate you. So we've confused everything here. We've drawn this contrast between love and hate and then told if we're love, if we love as Christ is love, then we're going to be hated by this world.

[11 : 10] But he's pointing us back to something very important in the Gospels. He's pointing us back to when Jesus talked to his disciples and the two commands that he gave them or the two warnings.

One was to love one another and the other was the warning that if you do so, that you'll be hated. And John gives us an equally stern warning here at the end of verse 14.

Whoever does not love abides in death. Murder, hate and death. Sounds like judges. John is kind of dogpiling on this idea that all of these things do not coincide with eternal life.

They do not coincide with faith in Christ and they do not look like love. And hate and murder are related. We know that from the Beatitudes. You know those things that Jesus says to them where he takes the law and he expands it out and says, if you do this in your heart, in fact, you're guilty of these things.

And Cain doesn't simply murder, but he hates. But John's words here are to us. Look at verse 15 with me.

[12 : 21] Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. It's not just Cain anymore that murders. It's anybody that has hate in their heart murders.

And if you do that, you're not abiding in eternal life. It's important to note here that there's a sense in which he communicates a present action that's continuing.

It's hating and continuing on. Right. If you're not troubled by that hate in your heart and called to repentance by the witness of the spirit or your wife or a friend or God's word.

Then if we continue on in that hate, that's what he's talking about. An ongoing failure to love. That's what true love is not. I think often we think about love and hate and or ideas in scripture that are opposed to each other and their differences of degree.

Right. Just like shades of gray. But love and hate are two opposite things. They cannot be further from each other than they are. When I was a kid, I grew up in Germany for a large part of it.

[13 : 31] And my parents were really concerned when I moved from Germany to South Carolina. They should be, right? They don't seem very similar. And so they were concerned that my brother and I were so kind of homesick.

They took us to this town in Georgia. And probably some of you have been to this town where in October it kind of replicates Bavaria. You know, that state in Germany that everybody thinks of. And we went after living in South Carolina for a few months. And when we arrived, my brother and I tried to talk to people in German. You know, the guy's wearing lederhosen.

Of course he speaks German, right? No, he did not. Right. The food, we thought it was going to be great and remind us of what we thought of as our home. It did not.

We thought the scenery would remind us of Bavaria. You know, these tall mountains with all this snow. It did not. Because after all, it's in Georgia.

[14 : 31] It's not Germany. It's not this thing where hate and love. Hate is not pretending to be love. It's not hell in Georgia pretending to be Germany.

Georgia and Germany are as different as hate and love. Yes, they're filled with people and all those things. But they are so different.

They have a different culture, a different language, different people, different scenery, different food. They're as different as hate and love. And we have to remember that when we come to sections like this.

Because as Christians, we often struggle with hating in our own heart. And we think, ah, the difference can't be that much. It's just a difference of degree. No. In fact, they're as complete opposite as you can be.

Love is not hate. Hate is not love. Now, the connection, if you notice here in Cain, what makes Cain's sacrifice different than Abel's?

[15 : 34] Abel's is done in faith. We see that in Hebrews, right? Acting out of faith and out of faith, an unrighteous or righteous sacrifice is accepted.

Without faith, that unrighteous sacrifice is not accepted. If you're here this morning, you're not acting out of faith. If you do not have faith in Christ, John is clear.

You abide in death. It's a really stern warning. It's not a difference of degree. And in fact, those two things are as opposite as they can be. As far as east is from the west.

You do not abide in eternal life. But in fact, you abide in death. Cain is this picture of what true love is not.

So that kind of begs the question, what is true love? Is it all those examples that we saw earlier?

You know, when we think of Valentine's Day? John goes right back to this source of ultimate love.

[16 : 36] This picture of ultimate love. Look at verse 16. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. And then he goes on.

Who's the he? It's obviously Jesus, right? The ultimate picture of love is the picture that we have in the gospel. That Jesus has died for the unrighteous.

And he's done so out of love. Not because it's transactional and I can bring something to him or you can bring something to him or anyone. But out of his mere good pleasure.

God in the flesh laid down his life for those that would follow him. Unjustly bearing the punishment for sin. Even though he was sinless.

That is the picture of love that we have. And how are they to love? They are to love because they know this truth.

[17 : 36] That's the second part of verse 16. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Now, we might read that next verse and think.

Or that next part of that verse of 16 and think. Good grief, John. I don't know what that means. Does that mean that I'm giving my life for other people at Shine Mountain Presbyterian?

Does that mean I'm giving my life away that I might lose it for a fellow believer? Don't you think that's a little extreme? What you're asking of me?

Like, what am I supposed to do with that? Don't worry. John gets real practical in 17. He says it might be that. But it looks like this.

If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brothers in need, yet closes his heart against him. How can God's love abide in him?

[18 : 37] Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. It's important to note here that he bases this in the love that God, the love that Christ has shown.

The example that Christ has done. And if we have that sense of love, we should desire to meet every need that we see. Maybe even give our lives for others.

But very quickly we become overwhelmed and exasperated at that. That's so big. The task is so huge. What do I do? And John kind of reigns that in and says, hey, it looks like this.

It doesn't mean that we don't go to the ends of the earth like the Great Commission says. Yes, we do that. But love looks real practical and tangible in these ways.

He says that if you have a need, if you can see that need among your brothers, if you can see it and you have the means to alleviate and you know about it, then you're to do so.

[19 : 45] And we should want to do so. And if you don't, then you're in trouble. Because it means that you don't understand the love that God has shown you. You know, we've talked a lot about in our vision for Shine Mountain, this idea of thick community.

That's what he's talking about here. It's being known by other Christians so intimately that we know when others have needs. And we meet those and desire to meet those because of the love that God has shown us.

And if we don't do that, then there's a problem. That's kind of the scope of our love for the brothers.

Now, in practice, this is what it looks like. It looks like giving to one another when they're in need.

He says, how could you not, right? He says, if you have the ability to know the need and you pass by it, then there's a problem.

You don't know the love of Christ. And oftentimes, and especially in a spiritual environment, especially when we take the Bible seriously, there can be this temptation that we're hesitant to get involved in people's lives.

[21 : 01] We kind of stiff-arm people and do this, yes, I will pray for you. But if that is the extent of our love and we continue on as we stiff-arm that need that we can clearly see, then we don't really know the love of Christ.

And if we give that answer, oh, I'll pray for that as I bypass a physical need and continue on from a brother, that is not true love. John says that in verse 18.

He says, little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. In deed and in truth. Or in deed and truly loving.

In true action. That's what he's talking about. James, the book of James, talks about this exact scenario where he says, if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and be filled without giving the things they needed for the body, what good is that?

John answers that question. He says, that has no good. That's nothing. The call to lay down our lives in love is real, and it's practical, and it's tangible, and it's sacrificial, and it takes money, and it takes time, and it takes resources.

[22 : 21] But it's not a burden because it's born out of love, and it's a spiritual good as well. That physical alleviation is a spiritual work.

And in doing so, what does that do? We know from the Gospels that that organic witness of the body is actually evangelistic.

People see that and think, why in the world would I want to give to that person? This is what got me. This is how I was converted, got me. This is how I came to know the love of Christ.

I could not explain as a high schooler and a college-age person why anyone would want to hang out with adults. Why would I want to hang out with people that weren't like me?

Why would I want to hang out with people that were clearly a little bit odd? The answer is the love that those people had for one another when I couldn't make sense of why they were together.

[23 : 22] There has to be something there that I'm missing. And I was missing this fact that the love that Christians have for one another is attractive.

People see that on some level, and they have to explain it. Now we have to hold that in tension with what Jesus said, that if we love one another, there still will be hatred from the world.

But if the Spirit is working in people, they will be attracted to that idea. They will see it for what it is. They will see it as God's love on display.

That's what true love is. John sets this vision of this picture of Jesus laying his life down for Christians, and he says, Follow me in this way. Lay down your life for others.

And this command could be up to laying down your own life, but it looks real and practical like helping people in this room. And we are known, Christians are known, for the love that we have for others.

[24 : 25] And we should see needs and hear about needs and desire to alleviate them. So how do we reign that in? Because if we look at all the needs around the world through all these ways that we hear about them, it can be overwhelming.

Tim Keller, before he was Tim Keller of New York City, was Tim Keller of Small Town Church in Virginia. And he wrote about this. Not what he was doing, but what his deacons were doing.

You know those people that are called to equip and serve those physical needs by loving others? He wrote about that first, we must look in this community.

That's the love of the brothers that John is talking about. We should see those needs on the outside, all across the world, and we should be moved by compassion. But we have duty and responsibility to love those people within the church and then beyond it.

Otherwise, we see all these things out there, and it can become like that fair game. You know, where you have the mallet, and the little groundhog pops up, or the mole pops up, and you try to whack that one.

[25 : 32] And then what happens? You see this need over here, and I'm whacking that one. And then I'm smashing this one. Never really taking care of the moles and groundhogs that pop up in the near term.

If we focus here, that has a corporate witness to those that are out there. This isn't a new idea at all, right? We see that in what Jesus says to his disciples, but it goes back even further than this.

This grand vision of compassion. Deuteronomy says this, You shall give to him, the man that's in need or poor, freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him.

Because for this, the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and all that you undertake. For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother and to the needy and to the poor that are in your land.

That is the call for the Christian. That we are to care and we are to love one another and to alleviate physical needs as we know about them.

[26 : 40] And as we see them and as we have ability to do so. The question is, most often for us in this room is, are we actually making time for other people?

Or are we so busy with everything that's going on that I'm running from this activity to that activity? Or I get confused and I think the spiritual work is only these academic things.

I can only read my Bible. That's the only spiritual work that I'm doing. John says, no. That actually caring for people and loving others in demonstrable, practical, tangible ways.

That is spiritual work. But that presupposes or assumes that we know each other. And it presupposes that we have compassion for others because God has compassion for us in the gospel.

Is your heart too cold to help one another? Or are we so smitten by what Jesus has done? I see everything before me and I have to rein it in to those that are around.

[27 : 50] I can't but help love others. True love is definitely not pictured in what Cain did. True love is definitely pictured in what Jesus has done.

And true love has effects in our own lives as Christians. Some of you will remember the old videos about grammar.

I think they appeared on PBS. I only got them in school because I said I lived in Germany. And it was, I think, Schoolhouse Rock. And one of the very famous was conjunction, junction, what's your function?

Right? And yeah, if you're above the age of like 25, you're like singing it in your mind and watching the cartoon. But it teaches us something that's very important.

That conjunctions give us moments for pause to figure out what's going on. And especially as students of the Bible, we should do that. And it doesn't really look like a conjunction to us.

[28 : 53] But John's doing this a couple times in this. He starts out with, in verse 11, for this. And then in 16, by this. Kind of looks a little same. And then in 19, he says, by this again.

It's showing us that there's some coordination going on. There's something going on, but we can't put our finger on it. And it seems like he's not talking about love anymore.

So what's it doing there? He's advancing this argument that we've heard over and over in 1 John. That the big question is, how do we have confidence?

How do I know that I'm a Christian? We saw that in the preamble to this section. It's marks our love. That's the one that we're focusing on here. But how do we know we're really a Christian?

If we love one another. But this conjunction in verse 19 starts with it. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him.

[29 : 53] Okay, that makes sense. We're advancing this argument of how do we know we're really a Christian? Because we love. But then it kind of gets sideways on us.

Look at verse 20. For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

And whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what is pleasing to him. What's John talking about there?

John's talking about the inward wrestling that we all have. I know that I'm supposed to love, but do I do it? And what do I do?

What does that say about my heart when I don't do it? He's realizing, gosh, I'm not sure that is me. And when we do see ourselves loving believers in real, tangible ways, what does that mean?

[30 : 55] How do I put those two things together? He's saying that we're confirming that God is at work, even when I don't see that in my life, even when I don't see that in my own heart.

That God is actually greater than my own heart. He's at work in us, and yet his work is not complete in our lives and in our hearts.

God is working to make us more and more like Christ, more and more loving, but we're not finished. We're not done. Reflecting on this passage, one theologian wrote this.

And when he says meanness, he means like not lovingness. God is greater than our meanness and is himself generous. And it pleases to see him when his people are acting generously and so being like him.

God is greater than our own lack of love. And he is working that out even in our own hearts. That's the work of sanctification. That's the work of us being more and more loving because we know the love that we've been shown in the gospel.

[32 : 09] But what does that have to do with the command in verse 22 or even verse 23 when he says, and this is his commandment? What is the command?

Well, the command is this, that we believe in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us.

We don't like to talk about believing and command, but John's really clear. The commandment here is to believe in Jesus and to love one another. So how do we know if we're truly a Christian?

Because we obey his command to believe in Jesus. And we obey his command to love one another because we've seen what Jesus has done.

And the effect of this is to abide in him. And how do we know even beyond that? He says in verse 24, whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him.

[33 : 09] That's the abiding part. And by this we know that he abides in us, the spirit whom he has given us. That spirit testifies to the fact that God has worked in our hearts.

And even when we can't feel it, especially in our hearts, when it condemns us and tells us, I'm actually not really loving. How do I know the gospel? Do I even know the gospel? Do I even know that Christ has died for me?

Yes. Because you asking that question and wrestling through that shows that God is at work in you. God is at work to make you more loving.

But we struggle with this question. The people that John wrote to struggle with this question. How do we know if we're Christians? Well, John gave them three marks, right?

They know the love of Christ. They love one another. And they have the Holy Spirit. So that even when we struggle, even when we fail to obey his command to love one another, we have these two others.

[34 : 12] And even when we question, do we know, really know the love of Christ? Because I don't love others? He's given us his spirit. He's given us these three things to remind us to abide in him.

Because we're not finished works. We struggle to love one another. And as we think about this, this really shows us our theology.

For all of the nerds in here. It shows us, do we really understand the love of God? Because if we did, we would love one another, even when they're weird, even when we don't like them, even when we think, man, I wish I didn't have to have a conversation.

It's none of us in here, right? But I still love them. And in loving them, I want to provide for them. As I see need.

As I have ability. And if I don't, there's something wrong. And we need to ask that the spirit would work in us. True love is less like Valentine's Day.

[35 : 22] And more like Jesus. That's, of course, yes. That is true love. True love is shown to us in the gospel of grace. That while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

That is what true love is. Let's pray. Lord, we are reminded this day of the love that you have shown us. That while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And the call is to love one another as testimony to God's love for us through Jesus. We pray that you would increase our faith.

Increase our love for one another as we go out from this place. Amen.