

Love One Another

Printed Text • 1 John 3:11-24

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE John’s message about loving one another; AFFIRM the fundamental discipleship principle of love for God and others; and EXPRESS unconditional love to others.

In Focus

Katrina held a part-time job at the hair salon after school, sweeping the floor and stocking shelves. Her goal was to save enough money to purchase a smartphone. Every morning on her way to school, she would look up at the digital billboard admiring the cell phone ad. When Katrina finally saved enough money to purchase a smartphone, she could hardly contain her excitement. Yet something deep inside told her to postpone purchasing it, so she waited. Later that month, the students chose Washington, D.C., as their annual class trip, and every student signed up to go. She overheard some mean girls gossiping about how Tiana could not attend the trip because her father was in jail again and her family could not afford to send her. When Katrina heard about Tiana’s predicament, and how heartbroken she was, Katrina was moved with compassion and immediately knew what to do with the extra money. With joy and without hesitation, she gave the money she had saved for her first smartphone to her friend. With tears in her eyes, Tiana gladly accepted Katrina’s unexpected gift and together they traveled with the class to Washington, D.C. They said it was the greatest trip ever.

Christians should give sacrificially to those in need. In this lesson, we will learn that love is more than mere words; it involves taking action.

Keep in Mind

“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11, KJV).

Words You Should Know

A. Laid down (1 John 3:16) tithemi (Gk.) — To place, to put, to set or appoint.

B. Beloved (v. 21) agapetos (Gk.)— Dearly loved one.

Say It Correctly

Sacrificial. sa-kri-FI-shul

Bowels. BOW-uls

KJV

1 John 3:11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

NLT

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

12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.

13 So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

14 If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.

15 Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.

16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?

18 Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

19 Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.

20 Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

21 Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence.

22 And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.

23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.

24 Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.

The People, Places, and Times

Cain. The eldest son of Adam and Eve, Cain was responsible for murdering his brother Abel. Cain became the tiller of the soil while his brother was a keeper of sheep. Both had brought a sacrifice to the Lord (Genesis 4:3–4). Abel acted in faith by bringing a sacrifice more suitable than that of Cain (Hebrews 11:4). The latter's rage burned out of control against God's rejection. In retaliation, he slaughtered his brother, whose gift had been accepted (Genesis 4:5–8). The Lord confronted Cain with his guilt, judged him, and marked him, sending him out of the land of Nod, east of Eden. When he protested that his chastisement exceeded his ability to stand under it and feared someone would kill him, the Lord promised to take sevenfold vengeance on anyone who dared to kill him (vv. 9–16).

Commandment. In previous books of the Bible, specifically the Gospels, our Lord had already charged His disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5:43–45) and love their neighbors as themselves (Luke 10:25–37). The "new commandment" required that Christians love each other (John 15:12, 17). This did not overrule the other two love commandments. Jesus' command to love those within the church was initiated to create persuasive evidence for those outside the church. It would provide them discernible proof (1) that His followers were Christ-like in their love toward one another, (2) that the foundation for vigorous human community could be found in Christ, and (3) that, by extension, Jesus' declaration about Himself in concert with the miracles He accomplished were really true (John 13:35, 17:20–23, 21:24–25).

Background

This letter was written to members of the churches in Asia Minor. The epistle served as a reminder to the children of God to love one another. The devil is the originator of sin and has sinned from the beginning of time. Those who belong to Satan reveal their essential nature by living lawless lives. This lawlessness is clearly seen in the blatant disregard for human life. John restated that Jesus laid the foundation on how we should treat one another. When Jesus died on the Cross, He demonstrated the greatest, truest, and most unselfish kind of love. His death validated that love is more than mere words; it must be followed by actions. When we say we love someone, our actions should prove our declaration. Displaying love for one another is evidence that we belong to God. Children of God should live to please the Lord in accordance with His commandments. To show indifference to the needs of others is in complete contradiction to the teachings of Christ.

In Jesus' day, many assumed that by obeying the commandments, they could show themselves worthy of God's blessings (Galatians 3:2). However, Jesus made it very clear that love was a natural result of God's blessing, not a precondition for it. The commandment to love is an

expression of how Christ's disciples should act. The disciples were commanded to love in the same sense that branches were "commanded" to bear fruit (cf. John 15:4).

At-A-Glance

1. Operating in Love (1 John 3:11–20)
2. Motivated by Love (vv. 21–24)

In Depth

1. Operating in Love (1 John 3:11–20)

Caring for others in accordance to God's will usually means doing the opposite of what is favorable in the eyes of the world. Some may retaliate against our good works, especially if our deeds glorify and illuminate the righteousness of Christ. Showing love toward another person should be prompted by genuine sincerity. In these Scriptures, Cain's reaction to God's rejection is murderous intent. It is difficult to fathom how one act of rejection could spur such violence against another. One might assume that these feelings of hatred and jealousy were dormant in Cain's heart, and God's rejection was the final straw. An unchecked attitude of anger, jealousy, and hatred can harden the heart, making it implacable. Our harsh words may not result in a person's death; however, words and actions can assassinate someone's character and destroy self-esteem.

The Holy Spirit is a filtering system that checks the contents of our hearts and purifies us through the Word of God. Real love is an attribute of God, seen magnificently in the life of Christ. When we lay down our lives for someone else, it means we serve expecting God to reward us. Love is action, not just words. Those of us who can give generously to support the needs of others ought to do so with an honest heart, not grudgingly or expecting favors in return. Our actions indicate our connection and affiliation to Christ.

Demonstrating a life of generosity in our church, communities, homes, and workplaces lets others know we belong to Him. There are times when we will fall short of God's expectations. Fear and uncertainty can hinder our ability to lovingly serve others; we may feel guilty and unworthy. This kind of condemnation is not from God. The Lord understands our apprehension. When we earnestly ask God to check our motives, we will discern the difference between godly and ungodly intentions.

2. Motivated by Love (vv. 21–24)

When our actions are motivated by love, we can approach God in boldness and confidence. Pure intentions glorify and please God, and a clean heart gives room for His love to flourish. When genuine love occupies our hearts, Christians express prayers that encompass both personal and community needs. These kinds of prayers include fellow Christians, our nation, the church, and the less fortunate. God answers prayers from hearts willing to see the fulfillment of His Word in both private and public arenas.

The love commandment requires that we believe in the name of Jesus and acknowledge that He is the Son of God, our Savior and Lord. This commandment also requires that we love each other, especially those in the body of Christ. This commandment also states that we remain in fellowship with God, which means staying connected to Him through personal devotion, meditating on the Word, and in prayer. This also includes staying connected with other Christians. Sometimes we are tempted to "do church" via the Internet; however, fellowship cannot be accomplished via satellite. We need to affirm one another through physical human sight and touch! Sometimes a person's smile and embrace can make a world of difference in someone's life.

When the Spirit of God radiates through our lives, we feel something exploding inside us. The living and breathing Spirit ignites us with joy and energizes the desire to love. Love is contagious! When we obey God's

commandments and live in intimate fellowship with Jesus, others will witness a change and ask what fuels our joy.

There is no greater witness to the saved and unsaved than expressing the love of God!

Search the Scriptures

1. What proves that we have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14)?
2. What shows that we love one another (vv. 18–20)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Living in a narcissistic society confounds our ability to love others, especially when individuality and self-centeredness are valued and rewarded. What can we do to combat these obstacles?

Liberating Lesson

Tragedy dominates media attention. The more horrific the crime, the more news coverage it receives. With this kind of media frenzy, wickedness appears to have taken an exalted position in our society, leaving many to question the true value of love. It is no wonder so many of us feel love is trivial and irrelevant. Yet, this lesson tells us no matter what goes on in the world, we are commanded to love one another.

Application for Activation

Love is a basic human desire and the evidence that we belong to the body of Christ. Love is more than a word, it is a repeated commandment from the Creator: Love one another. How can you express love? Make a list of things you can do in your church and community. Volunteer and serve today.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 John 3:11-24

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

John's message is clear: Love for one another is an integral part of the Gospel message. It is a command that Jesus gave to the disciples during the Upper Room discourse. It is also the command that He declared was the second greatest commandment outside of loving God Himself. From the outset, love was a vital part of Jesus' teachings. If love for one another was absent in a community, then they were not following the way of Jesus.

In this verse, John states that love should not be an afterthought. Obedience to Jesus' command to love one another as He loves us is expected of anyone who accepts the Gospel message. Love shows us that the Gospel includes both the benefits of salvation and the responsibility of Christians to love one another. It goes hand in hand and is not separate or tangential to the Christian faith. The message of the Christian faith is love, obedience to the command, and imitation of the life of Jesus Christ.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Cain is cited here as an example of one who did not show love for his brother. Cain is characterized as "that wicked one." The word "wicked" (Gk. *poneros*, poh-nay-ROHS) is also translated as "hurtful" or "evil" and refers to someone who is bad or would cause harm. John is explicitly saying that Cain belonged to Satan. Saying Cain belonged to Satan is John's way of pointing out that the way we treat each other is part of the larger cosmic battle between good and evil. If we are characterized by love, it will affect our behavior. Likewise, if we are characterized by hatred, it will certainly show in our behavior. Hence the saying that we sin because we are, by nature, sinners. We are not sinners because we sin.

Cain slew his brother Abel because his "works were evil." Notice that same Greek word, *poneros* (poh-nay-ROHS), translated earlier in the verse as "wicked one," is now also used to describe the quality of Cain's works. Cain's murderous act was most assuredly not motivated by love, like his brother Abel, but by hatred.

From the example of Cain, we see that hatred facilitates envy, violence, and murder. While we may not literally murder people, we may assassinate their character and reputation because of hatred (cf. Matthew 5:21-22). We must avoid hating others, especially Christians, because of the murderous and devilish nature of hatred.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. 14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

“The world” here is representative of all those opposed to God. John is saying that we as Christians should not be surprised because the world hates us. It is the expectation for Christians to love one another in obedience to Christ’s command. Such acts of love, then, translate into acts of righteousness.

Obedying Christ’s command to love one another gives Christians an inner knowledge and assurance of their passage from spiritual death to spiritual life. Love for fellow Christians is a dynamic experience that testifies to the reality of the spiritual journey from death to life in Christ. Metaphorically, John compares brotherly love as a rite of passage representative of a significant change or progress in one’s spiritual life. It is crucial to note that John does not say that one can pass simply by loving others—that would be salvation by works. Rather, his point is that having love for others is evidence of one’s maturity and passage from death of sin to a life based on faith in Christ. So love is the evidence of, and not the means of, salvation.

A nominal Christian who does not demonstrate love has not embarked on this spiritual journey; that person is still in a static state of death. The absence of love for others shows that one has yet to come alive spiritually; they have not allowed the Holy Spirit, who enables us to produce the fruit of love, to come into their hearts.

15 Whosoever hated his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

This is an echo of Cain’s experience from verse 12. John presents to his readers the serious consequence of hatred and establishes the parallel between hate and murder: anyone who, like Cain, hates his brother is also a murderer. One could assume that this verse means that a true Christian cannot hate his fellow Christian. But it is a fallacy to believe that the people of God are incapable of hatred and murder. The Bible records several instances of murder by those who were His people. Moses, who killed an Egyptian (Exodus 2:12), and David, who had Uriah killed to conceal his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:9), are two major examples. Having established this link with Cain, John now concludes that hatred of others is the spiritual equivalent of murder and that no murderer is entitled to eternal life.

The word for “abiding” is from the Greek word *meno* (MEH-noh), which means to remain, last, or endure. Its use here by John is very important. John says that although believers possess eternal life, those who hate or murder do not have Christ’s Spirit residing within them. Thus, hatred is the equivalent of moral murder.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The love of God for others is made known not just in words but in concrete acts of love. The Greek word *ginosko* (ghee-NOOS-koh), translated here as “perceive,” refers to obtaining knowledge. John is saying that we will obtain knowledge of the love of God by looking at the life of Jesus. Very practically, God demonstrated His love to us by sending His Son to lay down His life on our behalf. This demonstration of divine love is the heart of the Gospel. Christ gave His own sinless life to pay the penalty incurred by our sins. He now offers the pardon resulting from

this sacrificial act of love to all who will accept it by faith in Him. Divine love is a giving love. God gave His Son for love. The Son gave His life for love. The Greek word agape (ah-GAH-pay), translated here as “love,” finds its ultimate definition in Jesus’ unconditional act of giving.

If Christians follow this model of divine love, then they too ought to give something of themselves to express their love for one another. Jesus says, there is no greater love than this self-sacrificing love (John 15:13). That is why Christians are called to a self-sacrificing love rather than a self-preserving love. As beneficiaries of this kind of love, it is incumbent on us to love others in the same way.

17 But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

John says when anyone has the material means to help the needy but refuses to give compassionately, the existence of a Christlike love in such a Christian is open to question. Using a rhetorical question, John shows that God’s love does not exist in anyone who can refuse to help those in need. At issue is not whether God loves the person, but whether such a person possesses God’s kind of love toward others.

Our material possessions are not given to us only for self-indulgence. God’s command to love others requires that we use our possessions to obey that command. Some regard worldly possessions as an end in themselves. But John says they are a means for expressing God’s love in us, opening the door of compassion in us, enabling us to reach out to others in need.

The Greek word *splagchnon* (SPLANGKH-non) literally means “bowels” or “intestines,” but figuratively means “tender mercy or inward affection,” and here indicates that compassion is a quality of one’s inner emotions. Now, we use similar metaphors when we talk about feeling something deep down, in our “gut,” or with our heart. As such, love must unlock it from inside before it can show outwardly. Anybody can perceive a need, but not everybody has the compassion to help others.

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Addressing his readers as children not only suggests that John is advanced in years, but also shows the family atmosphere he is trying to create among his readers. There is no better institution that reflects the kind of sacrificial love John is writing about than the family. Including himself in the admonition, he says, “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue.” The construction suggests like a father giving advice, John was asking them to stop merely talking about love, but show it in deed and truth.

Christian love is more than a feeling: It involves the essential ingredient of giving. Many times when people say they love another, their only real action is from their mouth (i.e., “in tongue”). An expression of love that is backed up by only the tongue is not true love like Christ’s self-sacrificing love. True love engages in actions centered on others. The world is tired of passive love; only active love will attract outsiders and make them want to join God’s family.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

The word “hereby” (Gk. en touto, ehn TOO-toe, here meaning “by this”) refers to verse 18 and points to an active expression of love that corresponds to Christ’s self-sacrifice. When Christians demonstrate this kind of active love, they know they belong to the “truth” (Gk. aletheia, ah-LAY-thay-ah, what is true in things pertaining to God and the duties of man, morality, and religious truth). In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the sheep on Christ’s right were commended for their acts of love toward others and were rewarded accordingly by Christ (Matthew 25:31–46). In the future, when Christ returns, we will all stand before Him to be judged and rewarded according to our deeds.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

The Greek word kardia (kar-DEE-ah) refers to the heart organ, but here it figuratively denotes the center of all physical and spiritual life. Therefore, if the testimony of our hearts is negative, then we have not been sacrificially reaching out to love others like Christ. Fortunately, God is greater than our hearts and knows better our motives for service. The Greek word for “condemn” is kataginosko (kah-tah-ghee-NOHS-koh), which means to find fault, blame, accuse, or condemn. Our motives may be unknown to others, but deep inside we know our reasons. Just as we cannot deceive ourselves, we cannot deceive God, who knows all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. 22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

As Christians, we must learn to listen to our inner voice so we can have confidence before God. The Greek word for “confidence” is parrhesia (par-ray-SEE-ah), which means openness, or speaking or acting without concealment. It may be easy to deceive others, but God knows our hearts. Therefore, John says, if our hearts are open and honest, we can go confidently before the throne of grace and petition God.

Verse 22 discusses the benefits of a positive testimony of the heart. If we have a confident heart because we keep God’s commandments and do the things that please Him, then we also have assurance that we shall receive whatever we pray for that is in line with His will. John’s point is that disobeying Christ’s command to love can hinder our prayers, so we should obey Him.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

In this verse, John provides the crux of his epistle. When Christians act in obedient, self-sacrificing love, we gain confidence toward God. Faith in Christ and love for one another bring us into a new relationship with God where we become His children. Believing on the name of Jesus Christ includes accepting the fact that He is the Son of God who gave His life to pay the penalty for our sins, reconciling us back to God.

The second part of the commandment is to love one another. The sequence is important. The command is that we both have faith in Christ and also love one another. Faith in Jesus Christ is the basis of our new relationship with God, and love for one another is the expression of that saving faith in us.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

To keep God's commands, which includes loving one another, is to abide in Him and to have Him abide in us. As referenced previously in verse 15, the word "abideth" (Gk. meno, MEH-noh) means to continually be present. This mutual indwelling characterizes the relationship between God and His Son Jesus and points to their unity (John 17:21). The believers' mutual indwelling with God is also a reference to the familial union between God and His believing children.

God is present in believers through His Holy Spirit, who dwells in them (cf. Romans 8:9, 11). Through the presence of the Holy Spirit within believers, they have a sense of belonging in God's family. Paul says, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (v. 15). This context shows that by the Spirit we know we are children of God (v. 16). Since God is love, His children should also be characterized by love. Just as we love members of our earthly family and enjoy getting together with them, so believers will enjoy helping others if they have the love of Christ in them.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

1 Thessalonians 2:1-10

TUESDAY

Ephesians 5:8-16

WEDNESDAY

John 3:16-21

THURSDAY

1 John 2:28-3:10

FRIDAY

3 John 1:1-4

SATURDAY

3 John 1:9-12

SUNDAY

1 John 3:11-24