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“My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (I John 3:18).

Love One Another

Central Truth: Christians demonstrate God’s love.

L255. Date: January 1990. **Text:** I John 3:11-24. **Topic:** Love: Of Others.

A great tragedy of the present generation is that there is so much talk about love and so little demonstration of it. .

No wonder we have difficulty expressing love. We have a problem identifying it. The same word in the English language is applied to every emotion and involvement from sexual lust (which some call love) to God's devotion to His children. What confusion! When you say “love,” you almost have to define what you mean by it.

First John 3:11-24 states the Christian perspective on love. Here is love in practical expression. It is more than a feeling of good will or of intense and possessive preciousness. It is something we do as well as feel. It is God in action through us.

It is possible for the Christian to love a person he does not like. You like a person because he agrees with you and pleases you and likes you in return. You love a person (in the divine sense) because he has a need you can help meet. You love him for the potential in him, not because of his merits. As a Christian, you love him because God loves him.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE (I John 3:11)

A. Love is a basic Christian quality. It is the message we have heard from our first acquaintance with the gospel. Can you remember the first time you heard that God loves you? Do you remember learning little choruses like “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so”? Can you remember the first time you heard John 3:16, “*For God so loved the world,*

that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”? Do you remember the love of God changing your attitude toward people in general and particular persons specifically when you trusted Jesus? Yes, love is basic. It is *“the message that ye heard from the beginning”* (verse 11).

B. Love carries a witness of our faith. Jesus made it quite clear that we are to love as He loves. Anything less than that disobeys Him and grieves the Holy Spirit. *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (John 13:3, 4, 35). The love of God in the life of a believer marks him as different from the unregenerate world. That love is a witness to the reality of knowing God personally by faith in Jesus Christ.

C. Love is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Non-Christian people can love with human love. That may be an excellent devotion. But only the Christian can love with the love of God. We can do it! *“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”* (Romans 5:5). Since our love is God's love flowing through us, we can love the unlovely and the unloving. We can love all whom God loves, which is the whole human race. Think about that!

II. THE ABSENCE OF LOVE (I John 3:12, 13)

A. The absence of love is seen in heartlessness toward others. Read Genesis 4 for a vivid example of a loveless spirit. Cain became jealous because God accepted his brother Abel's offering and rejected his own. Instead of dealing with God about the cause and the cure of the rejection, he killed his brother. Then he pretended that he did not know what had happened to Abel. John calls that up as an example of the absence of love.

We are not likely to hunt up a person and murder him today. But we can wound his spirit, blemish his reputation, and limit his ministry by wrong words, bad attitudes, or evil deeds toward him. The absence of love leaves a heartless spirit.

B. The absence of love is shown in concern only for self. We provoke one another and envy one another when we are committed only to selfish interests (Galatians 5:26). Envy does to the vitality of life what rottenness does to the flesh. Jesus would deliver us from the sin of selfishness to the self-giving of true love. There is much selfishness in our world today. Listen to people talk about “my rights.” We should be seeking to give rather than to get, to serve rather than to be served. Any other spirit indicates that love is

absent.

C. The absence of love is the spirit of the unregenerate world. Jesus warned His disciples, *“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. . . . They hated me without a cause”* (John 15:18, 19, 25). You are not of the world; you are of Christ. You have the nature of God indwelling you. You have the Holy Spirit of God living in you. You have the love of God spread abroad through your heart. Manifest your love. To be loveless is to be Christless.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF LOVE (I John 3:14)

Here is one of the most challenging verses in this first epistle of John: *“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”* (I John 3:14).

A. Love creates a perfect confidence. *“We know”* leaves no room for doubting or disputing. It is assured assurance; it is certainty guaranteed. Here is proof positive. Do you catch how strong the affirmation is? Do you ascertain what assurance the Lord gives here? The person in whom the love of God dwells has no reason to doubt.

B. Love refers to a divine deliverance. *“We have passed from death unto life”* (verse 14). What a transfer! John 5:24 says that exchange comes when a person (1) hears the message of Jesus and (2) believes on God who sent Jesus as our Savior. It is a finished transaction. It is already done for the person who is trusting Jesus. It is something God does for us and in us, not something we perform on His behalf or even with His help. Salvation is God's work from start to finish.

C. Love is personal. *“We love the brethren”* (verse 14). Which ones? Everyone! The children sing, *“Jesus loves the little children, / All the children of the world. / Red and yellow, black and white, / They are precious in His sight; / Jesus loves the little children of the world.”* And He does. The adults could sing the same thing about each other: *“Red and yellow, black and white, we are precious in His sight.”* We look to Him as Master and look upon each other as brothers and sisters. Love includes all but is expressed personally.

D. Love is evident. Where it does not reside, there is an evident emptiness. It is no wonder. *“He that loveth not his brother abideth in death”* (verse 14). What a contrast that is with the person who loves his brother.

Would you dare judge yourself by that standard? Do your acts and

attitudes reflect that you have passed from death unto life, or that you are abiding in death? What we are shows forth through what we say and do. Show your love. Jesus said that people would truly know that we were His disciples if we loved one another. Show your love. It will be another element of assurance to your faith.

IV. THE SACRIFICE OF LOVE (I John 3:16-21)

A. Love's sacrifice demonstrates the love of God (verse 16). We see God's love by the sacrifice it made when Jesus laid down His life for us. How can we show our love? By laying down our lives for others. Is that too demanding? God didn't think so. But then, He loves us.

Our call in Christ is to “*walk in love*” (Ephesians 5:2). We do that as every relationship we have with our peers is influenced by a spirit of sincere good will and willingness to serve for the good of that person. Our love sacrifice will never be as great as our Lord's. But we should stand ready to love as He loves, whom He loves, to the extent that He loves.

B. Love's sacrifice is expressed in practical service (verses 17, 18). God's prophet said we show love when we give bread to the hungry, give shelter to the poor, and provide clothing for the naked (Isaiah 58:7). Love is eminently practical. There is a special element of sanctity in benevolence because “*he that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD*” (Proverbs 19:17). Love is not just something you feel or say; it is something you do.

C. Love's sacrifice is the spring of assurance (verses 19-21). Here is one way we can know that we know Him. Our love to one another is a proof of salvation. That love is not in a vague emotion of good will, but it is the motive of our relationships and the spring of our actions. It is a surrender of self to the good of our peers. This is how we can know that we are of the truth and can have assurance of heart before the Lord. God says so!

V. THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE (I John 3:22-24)

The commandment to love is often repeated in Holy Scripture. God first stated it in the Old Testament with a command that we love Him and love our neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). Jesus repeated it in the Gospels (Mark 12:29-31). Paul commanded it in his epistles (Galatians 5:13) and identified it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). John summarized it in his statement: “*This is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another*” (I John 3:11).

First John 3:22-24 sets forth four principles concerning Christian love. (1) It is related to answered prayer (verse 22). (2) It is the consequence of faith (verse 23). (3) It is an act of obedience to God and not an emotion that we cannot control (verse 23). (4) It is based on the presence of the Holy Spirit of God (verse 24). Read those verses in the light of those four principles. Let them encourage you to love every person you meet in the love of God, not because you want to but because you are commanded to.

A married couple had come to the pastor for counsel. The husband stated their problem: "I just do not love her anymore. I met someone else and fell in love with her. I just could not help it." Ridiculous! Love is not something we cannot help, like catching the measles. True love involves an act of the will. It is a commitment to the beloved as well as a desire toward the beloved. If one is attracted to the wrong person, he can control that by a discipline of the will. True love is always holy and pure.

How can you love with that kind of love? Love with the love of God which is shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. Love as He loves. Ask Him to love your family, your friends, your associates, and strangers through you. That is real Christian love.

Questions for discussion

1. How would you define love?
2. In what sense is love a basic Christian quality?
3. How can Christian love be a witness for Jesus?
4. In what sense is love a fruit of the Holy Spirit?
5. What does it mean when a person does not love?
6. How would you explain I John 3:14?
7. How would you express love for fellow believers this week?
8. Why is love always sacrificial?
9. How is love related to benevolence toward the poor?
10. How can you show your love for God today?