

By This We Know Love
(1 John 3:10-24)
Expository Lessons from First Letter of John

I. Background and Review

- a. The prior lesson closed with a discussion about *righteousness*. This included:
 - i. “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who *practices righteousness* is born of Him.” (1 John 2:29, NKJV)
 - ii. “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who *practices righteousness* is righteous, just as He is righteous.” (1 John 3:7, NKJV)
- b. John calls us to *practice righteousness*: to live lives of obedience to the commands of Jesus, avoiding sin. This is a way of life.
 - i. Those who continue to sin are “of the devil”.
 - ii. Clearly, he is not teaching that we are automatically righteous in the eyes of God due to the righteousness of Christ being imputed to us (regardless of how we live). We must *put righteousness into practice*.

II. We Also Must Love Our Brothers

- a. Read 1 John 3:10-3:24. We must love one another. There is a great emphasis on love in this passage.
- b. During a recent trip to a predominantly Muslim country in the Middle East, I asked some Christians how they came to faith in Christ. I also asked them how Jesus is viewed in their countries (since Mohammad in the Qur’an does speak of Jesus as a prophet).
 - i. They told me that many Muslims see Jesus as “the prophet of love”, since He speaks so much about love (as opposed to Mohammad, who taught about vengeance).
 - ii. In those cultures, many initially are drawn to Jesus and His teachings based on the emphasis on loving one another. Also, some told me that they saw much more loving and honest character in the Christians than they did in the Muslims.
- c. Previously in this letter John had insisted we must *practice righteousness* if we are to be the children of God. Here he adds that we must also *love our brothers*.

- i. This reminds me of the two-fold portrayal of true religion, in **James**.
 - 1. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (**James 1:27**, NKJV)
 - 2. James puts it in a very practical way: pure religion involves righteousness (keeping oneself from being polluted or spotted by the world) as well as loving our brothers (visiting widows and orphans in their trouble).
 - a. Most groups of Christians will tend to focus on either righteousness or loving and helping others. Very few fully embrace both.
 - 3. **Question:** Which of the two do *you* tend to think of as most important (practicing righteousness or loving your brothers)? Which one do you tend to focus on, and which one are you more likely to neglect?
 - a. While each of us may have different strengths to contribute to the body of Christ, we can't just specialize in one or the other (righteousness vs. loving others). Each Christian must fully embrace both as a way of life.
- d. John says, "This is the message *you heard from the beginning*, that we should love one another." (**1 John 3:11** NKJV)
 - i. **Question:** *Where* did they hear that? What is "the beginning" that John is referring to here?
 - 1. Seems to me that John is saying he is recalling something that they were given by Jesus in the beginning. This goes back to Him; John is not introducing something new, but instead is reminding them of what Jesus taught. Consider:
 - a. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (**John 13:34-35**, NKJV)
 - b. "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (**John 15:12-13**, NKJV)
 - 2. On the other hand, this also could refer back even further, to the Law of Moses, in view of some things Jesus taught.
 - a. Once Jesus was asked by a Pharisee who was testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You

shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
(**Matthew 22:36-40**, NKJV)

- b. Here, Jesus quotes from **Deuteronomy 6:5** regarding the greatest commandment, and from **Leviticus 19:18** regarding the second greatest commandment (to love your neighbor as yourself).
 - c. Jesus expanded on the teaching of Moses regarding loving one another. Moses called us to love one another as we would have them love us. However, Jesus took it higher, calling us to love one *another as He loved us* (laying down His life for us).
- ii. Why and how should we love our brothers?
- 1. Why must we love our brothers?
 - a. Reason #1: Jesus commanded us to love each other as He loved us.
 - b. Reason #2: Those who don't love their brothers are like Cain, who was a murderer.
 - i. Jesus had expanded the significance of the sixth of the Ten Commandments (**Exodus 20:13**), which prohibited murder, to include hating one's brother. Read **Matthew 5:21-26**.
 - ii. In the story of Cain and Abel, from **Genesis 4**:
 - 1. This is a story of two brothers. Abel (a shepherd) brought forth a sacrifice from the firstborn of his flocks. Cain (a tiller of the ground) brought forth a sacrifice from the fruits of the land.
 - 2. It says God respected (or looked with favor upon) Abel and his sacrifice, but not on Cain and his sacrifice.
 - 3. Apparently there was some sin on Cain's part involved with his sacrifice. Not clear to me if it was *what* he sacrificed, *how* he prepared the sacrifice, or *something in his heart* that was not right while he was making the sacrifice.
 - 4. In any case, rather than repent when God addresses this, he becomes resentful of his righteous brother, hates him and murders him.

5. In **1 John 3:12** it says that Cain was “of the wicked one (*the devil*)”; and he murdered his brother “because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous”.
- iii. The point John is making by referring to Cain: examine your own heart if you are resenting a brother.
1. **Question:** Do you hate or resent them (or want to tear them down) because they are more righteous in some area of their life than you are?
 - a. If so, don’t hate them in your heart, resent them, gossip or slander against them, or turn others against them. Instead, take stock of your own life, be convicted by their better example, and repent. As Jesus commands, pull the plank out of your own eye (**Luke 6:42**).
 2. **Question:** If a brother or sister accurately points out some sin or area of unrighteousness in your own life, do you resent that? In your own heart do you react by wanting to tear them down?
- c. John says whoever hates his brother is “a murderer”, who has “no eternal life abiding in him” (**1 John 3:15**).
- i. This is a very serious problem; a matter of our salvation. This is probably why Jesus tells us to settle matters quickly with our brother and sisters in **Matthew 5**.
2. Love is a word that can mean very different things to different people! For example, how people show love and what makes them feel loved varies enormously from person to person.
- a. When someone says, “So-and-so is a very loving person”, sometimes they just mean that the person is warm and expressive.
 - b. I learned early in marriage that what felt like love to me was not like what felt love to my wife (based on our upbringing and personalities).
 - i. For example, growing up, when I was sick with a cold, my mother would tell me to go into my bedroom and lie down and rest until I felt better. I felt loved, and thought this was a good idea (peace, quiet and rest to let my body heal itself, and not contaminating other members of the family).
 - ii. On the other hand, my wife’s idea of expressing love to someone who was sick was to react very differently: to make a big deal, attend to the person, make them soup and bring things to them constantly, etc.

- iii. As you can imagine, both of us were frustrated initially when either of us became ill, since what the other one did to express love and help was considered either annoying or uncaring (and unloving) by the other!
- c. A very popular book, *The Five Love Languages*, claims that there are five different ways (or languages) people communicate and receive love. Whether there are 4, 5, 6 or 57 varieties *I don't know!* However, I have noticed that many people do react to different expressions of love *a lot differently than I do*. The five "love languages" put forward by the author of that particular book are:
 - i. Words of affirmation (comfort and encouragement; consider **Hebrews 3:13**)
 - ii. Thoughtful gift (think of what the *magi* or "wise men" did when approaching the infant Jesus, in **Matthew 2:11**)
 - iii. Acts of service (such as cooking a meal, cleaning the house, taking care of things; perhaps exemplified by what Martha did in **Luke 10:38-42**, or by what Paul holds up regarding older women in **1 Timothy 5:9-10**)
 - iv. Quality time (undivided attention, listening; perhaps exemplified by what Mary did in **Luke 10:38-42**)
 - v. Physical touch (holding hands, physical forms of affection or reassurance, perhaps exemplified by Jesus touching the leper in **Mark 1:40-41**)
- 3. In contrast to the *Five Love Languages* approach to communicating love effectively (for example, in a marriage), the emphasis of John here in **1 John 3** is that real love involves *action*, deeds and *sacrificing to meet real and critical needs*. The principles laid out here by John are universal, applying to all types of people.
 - a. Jesus demonstrated His love for us *by what He did*, not by what He said.
 - i. "By this we know love, because *He laid down His life for us*. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (**1 John 3:16**, NKJV).
 - 1. It seems to me that this is the essence of real Christian love: follow the example of Jesus, and lay down our lives for our brothers.

- ii. This goes back to the foundation of the Christian life, as we discussed in a prior message in this series.
 - 1. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also *to walk just as He walked*.” (**1 John 2:6**, NKJV)
 - 2. To John, the question was not so much “What *would* Jesus do?” (once popularly abbreviated “WWJD”, which can leave it largely to one’s imagination and subjectivity) as it is, “What *did* Jesus do?” (“W*D*JD”, which drives us back into the gospel accounts and the life of Jesus).
- 4. If we see our brother in need and have the ability to help, but instead “*shut up our hearts*”, we do not have the love of God in our hearts. (**1 John 3:17**)
 - a. The Greek term generally translated into English as “the heart” here is τὰ σπλάγχνα (ta splagna) which literally means “the guts / inward parts / bowels”.
 - i. This term was used figuratively in Greek to refer to the seat of one’s emotions and love, as can be seen in **Proverbs 12:10** in the Septuagint.
 - ii. In English, we use the term “heart” figuratively, in the same way.
 - b. **Question:** What does it mean to “*shut up*” your heart? How does someone do that?
 - i. I think of the example of homes that are “shut up” in the advance of an approaching hurricane, for example in Florida. The homeowners take plywood and board up the windows of their homes, to harden their houses against the effects of the anticipated storm.
 - ii. From the New Testament, a good illustration of those who “shut up their heart” (in contrast with one who did not) is given by Jesus in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (Read **Luke 10:25-37**.)
 - 1. This story is told by Jesus to illustrate what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (illustrating what it means to love someone), as well as to answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”.
 - 2. The priest and Levite (religious people) shut up their hearts. They passed by on the other side of the street to avoid an uncomfortable encounter that could cause them to feel guilty in their hearts.

3. The Samaritan did not shut up his heart. He saw the man and *had compassion* in his heart for the unfortunate man. Then he sacrificed his own time and money to “love his neighbor as himself”.
- c. The three steps of really loving one’s neighbor, as we see in the story of the Good Samaritan:
- i. Don’t shut up your heart and avoid the person in need.
 1. Many of us who live in communities where we don’t often see others in great need. We can end up shutting our hearts to the needs around us by isolating ourselves and never even seeing those in need.
 2. In situations like this, we need to make additional effort to go out of our way to become aware of those in need here or elsewhere.
 - ii. Have genuine compassion on the other person.
 1. Consider what they are experiencing. Don’t emotionally wall yourself off. The Samaritan in this story is a great example.
 2. I think of Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, having empathy for all those mourning for him.
 - a. “Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept.” (**John 11:32-35**, NKJV)
 - b. Jesus knew that He was going to raise Lazarus. He had previously told His disciples, “...Our friend Lazarus *sleeps*, but I go that I may *wake him up*.” (**John 11:11**, NKJV)
 - c. I believe Jesus is weeping not because He loved Lazarus and was mourning the death of His friend, but because He had compassion on those around Him who were weeping at their loss.
 3. This (having compassion on those in distress) was the reason why Jesus told his disciples to pray for workers to go into the harvest field.

- a. There is a famous statement by Jesus that many of us think of in connection with evangelism (that there are many who are open to the message out there, and we need to pray for workers):
 - i. Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (**Matthew 9:37-38**, NKJV)
 - b. However, consider the motivation of Jesus behind making that famous statement. From the previous verse:
 - i. "But when He saw the multitudes, *He was moved with compassion for them*, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd." (**Matthew 9:36**, NKJV)
4. This is the underlying problem with the unmerciful servant in **Matthew 18**. His master was "moved with compassion" at his plight and forgave his debt; however, he did not have compassion on his fellow servant. (Read **Matthew 18:23-35**.)
- a. The willingness to forgive (or lack of motivation to do so) is all based on having compassion for others.
 - b. In my own life, I see this as the main thing I need to grow in, in order to grow in loving others: to thinking about how others are feeling and what they are going through; to have *compassion* for them.
- iii. The compassion must lead to action to meet the need.
- 1. "By this we know love, because He *laid down His life* for us. And we also ought to *lay down our lives for the brethren*. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, *but in deed and in truth*." (**1 John 3:16-18**, NKJV)
 - a. As the old saying goes, "*Talk is cheap*." We must demonstrate our love with action.
 - 2. This strikes me as similar to what James said regarding true saving faith (as opposed to believing without works to back it up).

- a. "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (**James 2:14–17**, NKJV)
- b. Following on in this discussion, after citing the example of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac, Paul draws the conclusion: "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and *by works faith was made perfect*?" (**James 2:22**, NKJV)
- c. In the same way, based on what John says, I believe also that *our love* is made perfect by our works, by what we do.
3. Consider the fate of the rich man who neglected Lazarus, in **Luke 16**.
 - a. The rich man has no compassion for Lazarus, a poor beggar who was neglected at his gate.
 - b. The rich man ends up in a bad place after he dies, and is filled with regret for those left behind who are headed for the same fate.
4. Consider what Jesus says we need to do to be prepared for his return.
 - a. **Read Matthew 24:45-51.**
 - i. The "faithful and wise servant" is the one who gives the other servants in the household food in due season. This is in contrast with the evil servant, who *abuses* his fellow servants.
 - b. **Read Matthew 25:31-46.**
 - i. The righteous, represented by the sheep at His right hand, were feeding the hungry, taking in strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting those sick and in prison.
 - ii. Jesus tells them that the good things they did "for the least of My brothers", they did for Him.

- c. Some groups of Christians focus on passages like these and turn the Christian faith into nothing more than a “social gospel” of helping the poor and those in need, while neglecting the teachings of Jesus regarding sin, repentance and righteousness. We can’t do that! However, we also can’t fall into the opposite error of focusing on certain other aspects of righteousness while ignoring this one (loving our brothers in action)!
5. Also consider what Paul holds up (different from what the world holds up) regarding exemplary older women.
- a. “Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.” (**1 Timothy 5:9–10**, NKJV)
 - b. The things held up by Paul here are largely related to showing compassion for other people.
 - c. The things most valued by God are often not appreciated by the world. The values of God and the world are completely different, and at odds with each other.
 - i. As Jesus said, “...what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” (**Luke 16:15**, NKJV)

III. Further Thoughts on Loving One Another (Helping Those in Need)

- a. Love is giving people *what they need*, which is not always the same thing as *what they want*.
 - i. God loves us as sons and chastens us sometimes for our own good. A loving father does the same thing. (**Hebrews 12:3-11**)
 - 1. God is a loving father who puts his sons and daughters through hardships, to refine them. This is for their own good.
 - ii. Especially for parents, this does not mean giving our children whatever they want! It is lovingly giving them what they need, to be equipped for life.
 - iii. Loving someone does NOT mean being an enabler who allows someone to continue in sin without facing the consequences.
- b. A loving church will discipline those who are in sin. Paul told the Thessalonians.

- i. (Keep in mind that this is written by the same apostle Paul who also wrote the famous passage in **1 Corinthians 13** about the importance and supremacy of love.)
- ii. “Now we exhort you, brethren, *warn those who are unruly*, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.” (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**, NKJV)
- iii. “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such *we command and exhort* through our Lord Jesus Christ that they *work in quietness and eat their own bread*.” (**2 Thessalonians 3:6–12**, NKJV)
 - 1. We must obey both commands: *feed* those who are hungry and unable to support themselves, but not feed those who refuse to work!
- c. If we are not doing things out of a compassionate, loving heart we gain nothing. Any good things we do must be done in love.
 - i. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (**1 Corinthians 13:1–3**, NKJV)
- d. We will need more of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit (who is described as the spirit of wisdom in **Isaiah 11:1-2**) to help us know how best to love and help others.
- e. Also, let us keep in mind the words of Jesus regarding how best to invest our money.
 - i. “And I say to you, *make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon*, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.” (**Luke 16:9**, NKJV)

- ii. Clement of Alexandria, an early Christian writer and teacher in the church in Alexandria, Egypt, explained the significance of this teaching of Jesus. Here wrote that when we give to those in need, they have an obligation to pray for their benefactors. Therefore, giving to brothers in need is like hiring an army of spiritual warriors who, although despised by the world, will prove of great benefit to us in the spiritual realm. Clement, writing c. 195 AD, said:
 - 1. "But contrary to what is the case with the rest of men, collect for yourself an unarmed, an unwarlike, a bloodless, a passionless, a stainless host, pious old men, orphans dear to God, widows armed with meekness, men adorned with love. Obtain with your money such guards, for body and for soul, for whose sake a sinking ship is made buoyant, when steered by the prayers of the saints alone; and disease at its height is subdued, put to flight by the laying on of hands; and the attack of robbers is disarmed, spoiled by pious prayers; and the might of demons is crushed, put to shame in its operations by strenuous commands.
 - 2. "All these warriors and guards are trusty. No one is idle, no one is useless. One can obtain your pardon from God, another comfort you when sick, another weep and groan in sympathy for you to the Lord of all, another teach some of the things useful for salvation, another admonish with confidence, another counsel with kindness. And all can love truly, without guile, without fear, without hypocrisy, without flattery, without pretense."
 - 3. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *Who Is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved?* chapter 34; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 601)

IV. Conclusions

- a. In addition to practicing righteousness, we must love one another as Jesus loved us.
- b. True love, according to the Bible, is much more than just a feeling. It requires that we not shut our hearts to the needs of others; that we have genuine compassion for others; and that this compassion *leads us to action*.
- c. Having this kind of love for others is likely to disturb your life, emotions, schedule and bank account. It probably will get in the way of accomplishing many of your goals in this life...*except for* the goal of inheriting eternal life.