

## How's Your Love Life?

(A Superlative Witness You Belong to Jesus)

### 1 John 3:11-18

**Introduction:** 1) One of the most effective ways of teaching is using contrast and comparisons. For example if I say male you think female. If I say boy you think girl. Tall/short. Small/big. Fast/slow. Up/down. North/south. East/west. Winner/loser.

2) The apostle John also found drawing comparisons and contrasts to be an effective means of teaching theology and spiritual truth.

- Walk in darkness/Walk in light 1:6-7
- Say we have no sin/Confess our sins 1:8-9
- Keep God's commandments/Do not keep God's commandments 2:3-5
- Those who love the world/Those who love the Father 2:15
- They/Us 2:19
- Antichrist/Christ 2:22
- Deny Christ/Confess Christ 2:23
- Confident at Christ's coming/Ashamed at Christ's coming 2:28
- Those who practice sin/Those who practice righteousness 3:4-7
- Children of the devil/Children of God 3:10

- Hates his brother/Loves his brother 3:10ff

3) It is that last theme that John will now develop further as he moves us into the 2<sup>nd</sup> major section of this letter. In 1:5-3:10 the message was “God is Light.” Now in 3:11-5:12 the message is “God is Love.” The importance of Christian’s loving one another cannot be overstated. In fact to hate your brother is akin to murdering your brother just like Cain murdered Abel in Genesis 4. Jesus teaches us that loving one another provides a superlative witness to a watching world. Remember what He said in John 13:35, “By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Love is a quintessential evidence that says to others, I belong to and follow after Jesus. My life is to be identified with His.

**Transition:** Once again, by vivid contrast, John instructs us, and enables us to examine the genuineness of our love life. The test is convicting. It is also clear.

### **I. Love one another and do not follow the example of Cain 3:11-15**

- Verse 11 flows naturally out of v. 10. The child of God, having been born of God, practices righteousness which includes loving his brother. In contrast, the child of the devil practices unrighteousness and hates (murders) his brother.
- There is a crystal clear contrast between children of God and children of the devil, between lovers and haters. To make this plain and even self-evident,

John goes back in time, all the way back to the beginning. There he draws our attention to the first murder in human history, the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. He will address both the act and the sinister source behind the act. Just as God delights in giving life, the devil equally delights in producing death, instigating murder.

1) Love is at the heart of the gospel      3:11-13

- In language reminiscent of 1:5, John says he has a message, a report, which his readers had heard at the beginning of their new life in Christ through the gospel. And what is the gospel message that they had received at conversion? It is simply this: “we should love (con’t) one another.”
- This word about love was not only something they heard at the beginning of their Christian experience, it is a word repeated again and again throughout the New Testament.
  - John 13:34 –“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”
  - John 15:12 – “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

- John 15:17 – “These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”
- Romans 12:10 – “Love one another with brotherly affection.”
- Romans 12:8 – “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”
- Galatians 5:13 – “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”
- Ephesians 4:2 – “With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”
- I Thessalonians 3:12 – “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you.”
- I Thessalonians 4:9 – “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.”
- Hebrews 10:24 – “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.”
- I Peter 1:22 – “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.”

- I Peter 4:8 – “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”
- And in this letter of 1 John, we will see this command given again in 3:23; 4:7, 11, 12. It also appears in 2 John 5. Obviously, God thinks our loving one another is extremely important.
- John, following Jesus, says we are to love consistently and comprehensively, love continually and individually. Play no favorites. Show no biases. Practice no discriminations among your brothers and sisters. After all, we are family! Love for others flows out of God’s love for us. It is at the heart of the gospel.
- To love our brothers and sisters is to stand in stark contrast to the 1<sup>st</sup> murderer in the Bible, the man named Cain. This is the only direct OT reference in 1 John. This tragic and well known story is recorded in Genesis 4: 1-6.
- Cain’s actions revealed his true spiritual father, the devil (cf 3:10). As Jesus taught in John 8:44 – “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

- The word “murdered” means to butcher, slay, slaughter. It speaks of a violent and brutal killing. And his motives? Moved by his spiritual father, “the evil one,” his heart was filled with jealousy, envy and resentment. Abel brought a sacrifice to God that was acceptable and “righteous” Cain brought one that was evil and unacceptable (v.12). Cain hated Abel over this and murdered his own flesh and blood.
- To all of this John says, “do not be surprised” (pre. imp). It could be translated, “stop being surprised” (v.13). It is natural for the world (represented by Cain) to hate you because it’s father hates you. Do not be surprised or caught off guard when people of this world, people like Cain, hate you. It is natural to their nature. However, don’t you be like Cain. Resist that primal urge to return hate with hate, murder with murder. The gospel has changed you, and love is at the heart of the gospel message. Where the gospel has taken root love will be the natural fruit.

2) Love provides assurance that we have eternal life 3:14-15

- Loving others has numerous positive benefits and blessings. One is we know we have been born again and have eternal life. In fact John says we have an abiding and settled knowledge “that we have passed out of death (spiritual death) into life (eternal life), because we love (con’t) the

brother.” In contrast, “Whoever does not love (con’t) abides (con’t) in death.” (v. 14).

- Now, let’s be clear on what John is saying and not saying. John is saying that continually loving others out of “gospel gratitude” (v. 16) for all that Jesus has done is evidence, a proof, that we have definitely and decisively moved from the realm of spiritual death into the realm of spiritual life. Again, let’s be clear. Eternal life is not earned by loving others, but it is an evidence that we have eternal life. It, therefore, becomes another avenue of assurance of eternal life. As I love well my brothers and sisters in the community of faith I am assured that I am in the family, the family of God.
- Interestingly, the word for “brother” occurs 15 times in this letter and almost always has in view the family of God. John, no doubt, would affirm our love for all men and women in general, but here he is calls for our love of our brothers and sisters in Christ in particular. Paul said something similar to this in Galatians 6:10 when he writes, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”
- Those whose lives are characterized by hatred give evidence that they have never been born again, that they “abide (con’t) in death” (v. 14; cf.

Eph 2:1-3). Further, not only do they live in the world of spiritual death, they are actually murderers as seen by God (v. 15). John is clear: an attitude of hate in your heart is equivalent to having murder in your heart.

- John again is drawing from words he had heard from Jesus. In the “Sermon on the Mount”, Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-22, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” John says it is really quite simple: “no love, no life.” Love and hate are moral, spiritual opposites. Both cannot reside at the same time in the same heart. “Our love for one another is the flower and fruit that indicates eternal life is at the root.” (Thabiti).

## **II. Serve One Another And Follow The Example of Jesus                      3:16-18**

- Real love, God’s love, is shown as well as spoken. It is tangible and not theoretical. You see in our fallen broken world, we are so often confused and unsure as to what real love is. Sometimes we are simply wrong in our understanding. Yes, we think about love, talk about love, write about love and sing (a lot!) about love. But, do we really and truly know what love is?



- No doubt love was truly expressed, given and received by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden up and until the Fall. Then everything went terribly wrong and murder soon follow with Cain killing Abel. And, it hasn't stopped yet, it has only escalated. Recently we learned of the horrible holocaust which is abortion in China. On March 14, 2013 the Chinese Health Ministry reported that 336 million abortions have taken place in that country since 1971. (*B.P.*, 3-19-13). Such statistics stagger us, but they should not surprise us. The god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) appears to be winning the day. And yet, in another amazing reversal, there will be "the death of death through a death," the death of the Son of God who "laid down his life for us" (3:16).

1) Service for others may mean dying 3:16

- Many have noticed the beautiful relationship that exist between John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16. The former is a demonstration of love. The latter is an explanation of love. John 3:16 says that God gave His Son for us. First John 3:16 says we should give ourselves for others. The Bible says you want to see love: look at the cross! The Bible says you want to show love: look at the cross! The Bible says you want to know love: look at the cross! The Bible says you want to live love: look at the cross!

- We come to an acquired and abiding knowledge of what love is when we consider the penal, substitutionary sacrifice of the Son of God on our behalf. He lived the life we should have lived and didn't. And he died the death we should have died but now don't have to.
- Love, at its core, is about self-sacrifice and self-substitution. And, in our case, it is for those who are completely and totally unworthy. In the song "Amazing Love", Chris Tomlin wonderfully writes, "Amazing love, How can it be, That you my King, should die for me? Amazing love, I know it's true. It's my joy to honor You, in all I do, I honor you."
- That is exactly what John tells us. Out of "gospel gratitude" for His laying down his life for us, "we ought to lay down own lives for the brothers." Warren Wiersbe says, "Self-preservation is the first law of physical life, but self-sacrifice is the first law of spiritual life" (p. 127).
- Jesus said it like this in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

2) Service for others always involves giving 3:17-18

- "I would die for you" sounds noble and spiritual. It sounds awesome. But, while you are willing to die for me, would you give me

something to eat? Could you share an extra shirt or better yet, a coat?  
 Could you let me sleep on your couch until I get back on my feet?  
 Could you help out with my electric bill or a few meds for my sick  
 kids? You see I don't need you to die for me. I just need a little  
 help.

- Talk is cheap, and I suspect that concept originated in the Bible! In verse 17-18 John gets down and dirty, and provides some basic, real and practical advice about love in the context of everyday living.
- “But” in v. 17 introduces a negative example using a greater to lesser argument based on verse 16. Jesus had a life to give and you have stuff (“world’s goods”) to give. Jesus saw your need and gave His life. You see your brother’s need and “close your heart.” How then “does God’s love abide in you?” The obvious and undeniable answer is, it doesn’t. It is not there.
- John knows the heart controls the hands! A closed heart will always result in closed hands, and is an evidence your heart has never been opened by the “key of the gospel” of God’s grace poured out in Jesus. The brother of Jesus, James, has the same concern and writes in James 2:15-17, “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 filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” Dead faith. Dead love. Neither one does any good to others.

- John concludes his argument in v. 18 with a simple maxim that follows a negative to positive line of reasoning, “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” Love is so much more than making a good profession or great speech that uses impressive rhetoric (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). No, love is an action word that always expresses itself in good deeds done in the context of truth. John adds the word “truth” for a very good reason. Words can be empty and actions can be hypocritical. You may choose to do nothing though your words promise much. On the other hand, you may do something for someone but your motives are impure and your intentions evil. We call this manipulation. God cares both about our motives and our actions. He wants us to love and care for others just like we have been loved and cared for by Jesus. Once more it is clear isn’t it? You want to see love in deed and truth? Just look to the cross.

**Conclusion:** 1) Living out the gospel means we have open ears, open eyes and open hands for the hurting. It means loving others as we have been loved by Jesus.

The late John Stott summarizes it so well, “Hatred characterizes the world, whose prototype is Cain. It originates in the devil, issues in murder, and is evidence of spiritual death. Love characterizes the church, whose prototype is Christ. It originates in God, issues in self-sacrifice, and is evidence of eternal life.”

2) So, let us not just talk about love, let us truly demonstrate love. After all Jesus didn't just say something. He did something!