

1 John 3:16-24

“God Is Greater”

I have discovered (perhaps you have to) that God likes to leave fingerprints. He makes it evident when His hand is in *something* or upon *someone*; and when it comes to His hand upon our lives there are a # of “fingerprints” that God will place upon us. There are various attributes that are indicative of every child of God. For example the child of God will be one who walks by faith and not by sight, he/she will be a person who seeks *after* and lives according *to* the truth as explained in God’s word. The child of God will be a person of humility, of peace, of kindness, gentleness and self control. Now certainly we grow and mature at different rates spiritually even as we do physically, but these things will be present in our lives nonetheless. As we come back into the context of 1 John Ch 3, John has drawn our attention to 2 additional attributes indicative of every child of God and they are these: righteousness and love.

What is righteousness? We’ve defined it like this: “leading a life (lifestyle) that’s acceptable to God.” We’ve called it, “Moral integrity and obedience to the word of God as the result of our love for Jesus Christ” That’s righteousness.

Today we want to spend a little bit of time developing the concept of love; what it is and what it looks like in real time in your life and in mine. How does it surface *among* us and show itself in the midst *of* us? Because we need both, like two voices singing in perfect harmony, righteousness and love are always to be working together in cooperatively. We’re not to exercise righteousness at the expense of love, nor are we to love at the expense of righteousness. Righteousness apart from love is legalism, it’s pharisaic, it’s *self* righteousness which leads to criticism and judgment of others *around* me because they’re not operating with in the same standards *as* me, therefore I’m a little closer to God than they are, I’m a little more spiritual than they are. However love apart from righteousness tolerates and will at times even help facilitate sin, because we “*love*” them we’ll not confront issues that are sinful in regard to them; compromise is the result.

Here’s the hard hitting reality, that’s not love at all. “What then is it?” Well, we know what it’s not. Those of you who braved the elements last week recall that rather than giving us a positive example of what love *is*, John 1st employed a *negative* example of what love *is not*. He used the illustration of Cain’s murder of Abel and spoke of the fact that there’s no room for a lack of love between brethren, oh don’t be surprised if the *world* hates you, but it should be absolutely staggering to see hatred between brethren in the body of Christ.

Because it's *His* love in *your* heart for *His* people that testifies of the fact that you've passed from death to life, out of being dead in trespasses and sins to being made alive to God in Christ Jesus. Remember, the world will hate you. But it's not their hatred for you that assures you that you're in Christ, it's *your love* for other believers that does that. Remember that which ratifies your position as being in Christ has *nothing to do with hate*, it has *everything to do with love*.

"Then let's get to it preacher, what is love?" I'm glad you asked let's read beginning in Vs 16.

Vs16-18

A whole slew of things to consider here. As it pertains to love John gives to us the *demonstration* (which also serves as our motivation), followed by an *exhortation* that leads him into a practical *application* and then he resolves his thought with what we might consider to be the *confirmation* or perhaps a *reaffirmation*. He's very thorough in what he has to say so that he leaves us with out excuse, no one will be left in the dark by the time John is through with them. As we've pointed out many times with John there's no uncertainties, there's no ambiguities, there's no question, no confusion or lack of clarity, he speaks very "matter of factly."

He says, "By this we know love." Out of those 5 words, 3 of them are very important; the 1st of which is that little word, "we." This is a word that alerts us to the fact that what he's about to say concerns you and me personally and applies to the body of Christ collectively, it's not abstract or allusive in any way, it speaks (believer) to you.

The 2nd word we want to highlight is this word, "know." This isn't a word that speaks of knowing something intrinsically or instinctively, some awareness that is simply in us naturally but rather it speaks of coming to know something *experientially*. John is drawing attention to a particular experience that has taught all of us (that is those of us who are of the family of God) what love is.

Which brings us to our 3rd word, "love." By this we know love; if I were to take a survey in this room which simply stated "Love is _____?" It would be interesting to see the responses that would be turned in. "Love is something you just know when you meet the right person." "Love is finding that certain someone who inspires you to do crazy things that you'd never do otherwise." "Love is a K.C. strip flame grilled to medium well with a loaded baked potato" All kinds of people mean all kinds of things when they employ the word "love."

Perhaps you remember a man by the name of Lou Gramm who used to sing for a group called Foreigner. He sang a song some 20+ yrs ago called, "I want to know what love is." He'd toured the world multiple times, he was a rock icon, adored by millions, he'd been with more women than we'd care to realize, yet his life was still lacking substance, there was still a hole in his heart that was void of understanding when it came to knowing what love really is; he hadn't experienced it. BTW now he's in Christ, he sang a # of yrs ago at a harvest crusade but when it came to that song he changed the lyrics to, "and now I *know* what love is" you see Christ had shown him, he'd experienced it for himself.

Now forgive me if I perhaps revisit common ground for you here but with in the context of love it's important to note exactly what kind of love we're talking about here that qualifies as the genuine article. Because there are all kinds of things that one might identify as love that really aren't love at all. The Greek employs a # of words that translate into the single word "love" in English. There is "Eros" from which our word "erotic" arrives, it speaks obviously of things of a sexual nature. Then there's "Storge" which speaks of a family kind of love, the love between a parent and a child, or family members in general. Most of us are familiar with "Phileo" which identifies the love of close friends, its brotherly love, the love of deep friendship.

Then of course there's "Agape" which is the self sacrificing, others oriented love of God that's not attainable by man on his own. It loves the "unlovable," it loves when it's refused and rejected, it expects no payment nor anything in return for its actions, and it's only experienced and learned through a personal encounter and subsequent relationship with Christ. As you've no doubt concluded by now, it's "agape" that's in view here.

We find the Holy Spirit defining love for us here in the 16th Vs in this way, "He (that is Jesus) laid down His life for us." I mentioned the fill in the blank survey a moment ago, "Love is ____?" According to what we're reading here it would be more accurate to say, "Love is *sacrifice*." Specifically, "Self- sacrifice."

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." This is the same idea that Paul sought to communicate when he said in Rom 5:8, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" It's interesting to realize that apart from the work of Christ upon the cross we could never really know true love, love on God's level. There's really no other means for us to learn it.

When you consider creation, it can teach us a # of incredible things about God, it can demonstrate His intelligence (as you consider its complexity and variety), it can demonstrate His power as you think through the magnitude of it all, the roaring of the seas, the glorious Mt ranges, the sun, the moon and stars, various planets and all. But one thing nature can never teach you about God is that He's a God of love. Nature may be beautiful to behold, but it's brutal to be in, take off into the woods or a Mt Range, set out on the sea for a few weeks with no supplies in hand and see how kindly nature treats you and how you fare. When you watch the magnificence of the cheetah running across the open plain and nearly 70mph it's an incredible sight to behold, then he pounces on the helpless gazelle, mauls it to death and eats it. Nature can be violent and unforgiving.

God didn't demonstrate His love through nature, He demonstrated His love through the cross of Jesus Christ Jesus demonstrated His love through laying down His life for you and for me. with out His example we could mistake love for any # of physical or emotional experiences. But Jesus shows us that true love, genuine love runs much, much deeper. It's not a feeling, or even an intention, but rather it's a choice that *binds us* to a distinctive course of action.

These words, "Laid down" could also be translated as "laid aside" Jesus *laid aside* His life for us. I like that, because it includes much more than the physical sacrifice of His person, He laid aside His glory, to walk in humility, He laid aside His right to be served that He might serve. He didn't only lay down His life upon the cross, He laid down His life in virtually every arena of life that He might minister to, and serve others. He chose the lower seat and gave to others the place of exaltation. He's our demonstration *of* love, and He's our motivation *to* love... notice.

"We also ought to lay down [or lay aside] our lives for the brethren." Now we're all familiar with the words of Jesus in saying, "...*whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them,*" Matt 7:12 somewhere along the line we started calling that the *golden rule*. But here it's as though John takes it to the next level, rather than treating people the way you want treated, treat them the way you've *already been treated by Christ!* In another place Jesus said it like this, "*For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*" John 13:15 Jesus loved you openly, outwardly, through self sacrifice specifically, that's the way we're to treat one another! (That's hardcore isn't it? Yet it's the call of Christ upon our lives...)

Jesus served you, He sacrificed Himself for you, He's shed His blood for you and has forgiven you; there's no price He wasn't willing to pay for you (and for me). How quickly we tend to forget that when we feel violated or offended by another brother or sister. We want to take them by the throat and make them pay, after we've been forgiven so much...and it ought not be. Turn quickly to Matt 18 (21-35)

God has forgiven us everything, a debt we could never repay, yet being moved with compassion for us, He forgave us all in Christ. How then is it that we have the audacity to withhold forgiveness from another brother who may've offended when they seek compassion from us? The bible says, "*Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*" Col 3:12-13

Now I realize that for us to be forgive Christ had to die; even so if forgiveness and reconciliation is to take place between you and that brother or sister someone will have to die. You'll have to crucify your ego, put to death your flesh and your pride, your rights; so that forgiveness can take place, we've got to "lay down our lives" for the brethren. Cain took a life, Christ *gave* His life, and we're called to do the same.

Which brings us to the practical application; it's easy to spin out spiritual platitudes and speak in Christian clichés and all nod in agreement concerning the fact that we're to lay ourselves aside to serve and sacrifice for the brethren. However when it comes to getting real with a single *believer*, well now that's different isn't it? Yet Christian love is both personal and active.

Vs17

I think this Vs comes to life with in the context of the parable of the Good Samaritan; a certain lawyer was testing Jesus with in the context of "Loving your neighbor as yourself" wanting to find out exactly who qualified to be his neighbor. Let's look together at Luke Ch 10

Vs 30-37

Notice Jesus draws the attention to a single person who was in need and in essence He changed the question from, "Who is my neighbor" to "Who can I be a neighbor to?" The neighbor being a person who has the means to do good for someone in need and is compelled by love to do just that not really allowing the cost to factor in because he/she has the means to minister in the situation.

Now, couple things we should note here real quick. #1 The word “sees” in Vs 17 means “to view attentively” “to consider carefully” or “to discern;” in other words the need is proven and verifiable. It’s not a rash/impulse kind of decision. We also realize that it’s not only something that is verifiably noted but the person is engaged emotionally as well, it’s something that’s stirring in their heart, and there where it says he “shuts up his heart,” the phrase could be used of the slamming of a door. It really speaks of slamming the door of your heart against any compassionate feelings toward the believer who’s need you’ve been deliberating on or contemplating about. Here’s the point; love that doesn’t move in the practical isn’t love at all.

Jesus was about meeting needs, you can see Him in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He’s the one who saw us beaten up and battered by the world, He took interest *in* us, picked us up and tended *to* us giving no thought to the price He’d pay on behalf *of* us.

Jesus was all the time meeting needs; He met needs physically, opening blind eyes, causing lame legs to leap, opening deaf ears, causing lepers to be made whole. He ministered spiritually, pointing people to the waters of life, sharing with them the word of God. He met needs practically, feeding thousands bread and fish on more than one occasion. James said, *“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 So you can see how these various tenants work together in the life of the believer stirring him/her to reach out, to move in a deliberate course of action toward the lives of others for their benefit and blessing.

Vs18

You see it’s not about lip service, it’s about life service. Now: is there ever a limit to our giving to a brother or sister who has an apparent need? The answer is “Yes” the limit is that which love itself will impose. “What do you mean?” 1st of all the bible is clear on a couple things, if there are other family members who are able to help the person, that’s the 1st priority. 2^{ndly} the bible says that if a man won’t work, neither shall he eat (2 Thess 3:10).

Here’s my point, there may be times when our giving to someone may actually enable them, or actually aid them in their endeavor to sin so that far from helping we’re actually hindering/hurting them. The question is, “Will this truly help them? Or does it perhaps confirm them in a position they ought not be in, in the 1st place?” Because the last thing I want to do is confirm someone in their irresponsibility or support them in a manipulative lifestyle or whatever, because in that case I haven’t helped them at all, but rather I’ve enabled them in their sin; that’s not love.

We should also note that giving doesn't always have to be in the form of money, it may include acts of service, the giving of oneself as Jesus so often did. But in either case our giving should be practical and from the heart.

Vs19

This is what we were speaking of a little earlier. This kind of love (self-sacrificing, others oriented, laying self aside to serve others and expecting nothing in return) isn't natural to man. If it's happening in your life, that should encourage and assure you before the Lord because it bears witness to a supernatural work of His Spirit in your life.

Vs20

Isn't that a wonderful Vs? When I was a new believer it was one of my favorite Vs in the entire bible, it served as an anchor for me. Because I was never really certain of my salvation truly; my heart was always condemning me. But when I ran across this Vs, it was like a revelation; "It doesn't matter what my heart tells me, God is greater than my heart, He knows I love Him, that it's my desire to serve and lead a life that's pleasing to Him; that I've received Him and repented of my sin, His power to save me is greater than my heart's power to condemn me. There's a higher court than that of my heart."

Now having said that I should say this, our problem isn't always that our heart condemns us when shouldn't, there are also times that it *condones* us when it shouldn't. Sometimes its not a matter of *condemnation* but rather *commendation*, it will approve of and justify sin for me.

The bible nowhere tells us to trust in the emotional state of our heart in a given moment. As a matter of fact we read things like, "*He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered.*" Prov 28:26 Where in is wisdom? The word of God. The bible says, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*" Jer 17:9-10 So we don't look to nor do we trust in our own heart (which accuses us one day and excuses us the next, commends us then condemns us), we trust in the Lord and take refuge in the safety of His word.

Because God knows the heart and He's greater than our heart, He won't make the mistakes that are made so many times by the dictates of our heart.

Now, having said all of that I want to isolate this phrase here for just a minute, underline it, be encouraged by it, “God is greater.” “Greater than what?” That’s the beauty of it my friend, put whatever you want in the blank. He’s greater than any problem you have, any puzzle that life has thrown at you, any area of confusion or any questions you may have. He’s greater than any inability, any personal insecurity, listen, “God is greater.” Trust *in* Him, draw strength *from* Him...

Here’s something else you need to realize, He “knows all things.” “What’s that!?” Everything; our secret sin on earth is like open scandal in heaven, all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account, He knows every idle word; the darkness and the light are both alike to Him; He knows all things. He remembers our frame and knows that we’re but dust, He knows those who are His, and as a Father pities His children so the Lord pities those who fear Him (Ps 103:13).

Vs21-22

That is, in His “penetrating gaze;” now when John says that we have whatever we *ask* the word “ask” is in the present tense speaking of a continuous action. We might call it a persistence in prayer, the Lord taught it, here John (through the Spirit) reinforces it as well. He’s basically reiterating what Jesus said when He said, “*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*” John 15:7 Now the idea here is not that we somehow *earn* God’s response by jumping through the appropriate hoops. But rather it’s that God is moving through your life because you’re flowing with in the sphere of His will operating in love, righteousness, truth and compassion. You’re looking to get His will done on earth, not your will done in heaven. You see when you’re in line with what’s on His heart, when I’m in line with the desire of His heart, He can move in my prayer life, I’m concerned for His agenda, not my own.

Sometimes we have not because we ask not, other times we ask, but we ask from selfish motives, God doesn’t bless the self centered request. That’s not to say He doesn’t want to meet our needs, but He’s not moved by our *greeds*, (you get the idea).

Vs23

In Vs 22 John speaks of *commandments* here in Vs 23 he expounds in this way; they’re 2, but they’re really only 1, “Believe on the name of Jesus Christ and love one another.” Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and love one another...not philosophically, but practically, laying aside our own lives personally.

Vs24

God will bear witness of His work in our lives through righteousness being a practical reality in us, through love being active through us and by His Spirit whom He has given us. We'll comment more on this Vs next time.

For now I want to close with this; "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us." Now listen, it's not the death of Jesus *itself* that demonstrates God's love, it's the death of Jesus together with what He's *accomplished for us* through it that shows us the epitome of love. If I'm standing on the dock at the lake and a man jumps in and drowns but with his last breath he shouts, "I'm giving my life for you!" I don't really see the love in that, however if I'm drowning and he jumps in to save me and in the process gives his own life so that I can live, I can see that what he's done for me and how he laid down his life for me was a great act of love.

We were all drowning in the ocean of sin and death, but Christ abandoned Himself, and thinking not of Himself He laid down His life that He might rescue us, He died that we might live. God is greater, He's greater than any struggle, any personal problem and we praise His name that He's greater than our sin, that where sin abounded, grace abounded much more and by this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.

Prayer Points:

Jesus it's difficult for us to fathom Your love, in that while we were against You, You laid down Your life for us. Teach us now to submit our lives to Your love, and to let Your love not only flow *into* us, but out through us to those around us. We praise You Lord that You are greater...greater than any need we may have, teach our hearts to rest in You.

If you're here and you have no rest, you're coursing with unrest, you're weary and heavy laden; Jesus bids you today to come to Him and find rest for your soul. Is it a step of faith? Absolutely, with out faith it's impossible to please God, because the one who comes to Him must believe that He is, and that He's a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. If you search for Him with all your heart, He'll be found by you, that's a promise. If your heart is crying out, you need healing, hope, forgiveness and mercy, than turn toward and trust in the Lord. He'll wash you clean and make you new...in Jesus name.