

“Love One Another” (An Exposition of 1 John 3:11-15)¹

Introduction

Here in our text in chapter three the Apostle John continues the theme that he ended v.10 with, namely that whoever does not love his brother in the Lord is *not* a true child of God. Not only did John previously touch on this same subject of *the love of the brethren* back in 1 John 2:7-11, but he will do so again later on in chapter four as well (4:20-21).

Clearly *the love of the brethren is a recurring subject in this brief letter*² because it is in many ways of *central importance* to what John is teaching us throughout. It is one of the three (3) tests that John gives to us as proof or evidence of a true and living faith in Christ. It is one of the means by which we are to be *assured* that we who have believed on Christ for salvation really do **“have eternal life”** (5:13). As John tells us in v.14, **“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”** (Italics added)

One of the ways that John sets out to demonstrate the truth of this to us is by showing that the command for believers to **“love one another”** is *essential to the Christian faith and life*. Indeed it is one of the very first things that we are taught by the Scriptures upon coming to Christ by faith.

In fact, it is so *central to the Christian life* from the very beginning that the *absence* of such brotherly love is actually indicative of the absence of a true saving knowledge of Christ. It shows that we have not yet been born of God, regardless of what we may profess to believe.

The Message Heard From The Beginning

The *first* thing that John does in our text is point us back to *the message that we have heard from the very beginning* of our lives as Christians. In v.11 he reminds us:

“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.”

Notice the little connecting word **“for”** (or *because*). This shows the *close connection* between what John said back in v.10 and what he says here in v.11. In other words, *why* is it the case that **“whoever does not love his brother”** is *not* truly a child of God? It is *because* (**“for”**) the message that we have heard from the beginning is that **“we should love one another”** (v.11).

Notice that once again (as he does *throughout* the letter), when John seeks to refute false teaching and to protect the church against its wicked influence, what does he do? He calls us to *remember the truth of Christ as it was originally given to us*.

False teaching always seeks to lure us away from the simple truth of Christ. False teachers (*wolves!*) will **‘speak twisted things in order to draw the disciples away after them’** (Acts 20:30). They disparage the tried and true **“faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jude v.3) in favor of their novelties, half-truths, and outright lies.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

² For example, the phrase “love one another” occurs no less than 4 times in this epistle (3:11, 23; 4:7, 12).

That is why, for instance, back in 1 John 2:24 John tells us,

“Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.”

And so here in our text he returns once again to that theme. He reminds us that we who believe in Christ have indeed ***“heard from the beginning”*** the message that ***“we should love one another.”*** We must remember this and keep this in mind. This will guard us against many of the heretics and cults of our day that would seek to turn us against the true love of the brethren in favor of a false church.

The love of the brethren really is *basic to the Christian faith & life. This was the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles.* In John 13:34–35 our Lord Jesus taught His disciples, saying:

“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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Notice that this ***“new commandment”*** is not only *our Christian duty*, but even there Jesus presents it as *persuasive proof to outsiders* that we really are the followers of Christ. It is by our sacrificial love for one another in the body of Christ that ***“all people will know”*** that we are His disciples.

The Apostles consistently taught these same things as well. For example, in Romans 12:10 Paul writes:

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”

Likewise the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us, ***“Let brotherly love continue.”*** (Hebrews 13:1) And in 1 Peter 1:22–23 the Apostle Peter writes:

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;”

Notice that Peter in many ways uses the same reasoning as John does here in 1 John – we are to love one another *because* [***“since”***]we ***“have been born again”*** (v.23) by the Spirit of God! New *life* in Christ brings forth a new *love* for our newfound family in Christ.

Let us who have believed on Christ for salvation be devoted to the truth of Christ even as we have heard it from the beginning, so that we are not led astray by the wolves in sheep's clothing.

Our Duty of Christians to Love One Another

The *second* thing that we should take note of in our text is *our Christian duty to love one another* – to ***“let brotherly love continue.”*** (Hebrews 13:1) If this is so *basic to the Christian life* that it was consistently taught from the very beginning, by Christ and His apostles alike, then we are duty-bound to make it our sincere aim to love one another in the body of Christ.

Do *we* love the brethren – each other? Do *you* sincerely love your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, and *not* just ***“in word or talk but in deed and in truth”*** (v.18)?

In some ways John defines brotherly love for us both *negatively* and *positively*. In v.12-13 John writes:

“We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”

To love one another, defined *negatively*, is to not be like Cain, who **“murdered his brother.”** Now that may seem like strange place to start, and a pretty low bar. After all, if all that is required for loving our brothers and sisters in the Lord is to refrain from violence and bloodshed against them, that doesn't seem all that difficult does it?

But that is *not* really John's point, is it? *Why* did Cain murder his brother? John really gives us two (2) reasons for Cain *slaughtering* his brother. First and foremost he did this because he was **“of the evil one”** (v.12). In other words, John is continuing his theme of *distinguishing between the children of God and the children of the devil*.

Cain was a child of the devil, spiritually-speaking; and Abel was (and *is*) a child of God. You might recall that *two peoples* and *two people* (ultimately the devil and the Lord Jesus Christ) were prophesied back in Genesis chapter 3. In Genesis 3:15 the LORD God said to the serpent:

**“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”**

In the very next chapter we read of Cain and Abel, who were both the biological seed or offspring of the woman (both were sons of Adam and Eve), but John tells us that *by his actions in murdering his brother, Cain demonstrated that he was of the devil* – a child of the devil!

And so John tells us *not* to be like Cain in hating our brothers. In fact, those who hate believers are also **“of the evil one”** and of the **“world”** (v.13). And why do they hate genuine believers in Christ? For the same reason Cain hated and murdered Abel – their own deeds are evil and the deeds of genuine believers are righteous (even if not perfectly so).

And so I ask again – do *you* love your fellow believers in the Lord Jesus? Or does their holiness of life offend you? Do you resent them and avoid them like the plague?

And the standard of love is not merely negative is it? Just as we learned in our study of the sixth commandment a number of weeks ago, to obey the commandment against murder means *more* than just to *refrain from harming others*, but also to do whatever we can to *preserve their lives*.

John gives us the positive side of brotherly love in v.16-18, where he tells us:

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

So the love that John is talking about is no mere emotional or sentimental thing; it involves *action*.

What is the standard of love that we are to follow? It is the example of Christ - **“that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”** The cross is the standard of love, even as Christ laid down his life for us and for our salvation, we are to imitate His example in laying down our lives for the sake of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now we will not often be asked to go that far, but we certainly cannot claim to be willing to do that if we are not even willing to part with **“the world's goods”** for the sake of our brother who is in need. Let me ask then, when was the last time that your love for a brother or sister in the Lord cost you anything?

I thank God that I know that many of you do things on a regular basis to show love and care for the body of Christ. And in doing so you not only help them and glorify God, but you also demonstrate, both to yourself and to the world, that you really are a child of God and a disciple of Christ.

Now I will say this, and in many ways it may seem like preaching to the choir, but it must be said that it is *impossible* to truly love the brethren if you refuse to spend time with them. This goes first and foremost for the Lord's day, but includes other time as well.

And so let us be ever mindful of the words of Hebrews 10:23-25, which tells us:

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Holding fast the *confession of our hope* in Christ involves *the gathered church*. And the writer closely associates considering how to stir up one another to love and good works with *meeting together for worship*, and **“encouraging one another.”** *If you would love the brethren, you must be with them!*

Brotherly Love as Evidence of Eternal Life

Last but not least, brotherly love is *not just a duty to be observed*, but also *an evidence of eternal life*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way:

“...we should love one another'; that is the exhortation, and yet he [John] puts it in such a way that it becomes quite plain to us that this question of loving one another is not only a duty, it is also a test, for as he goes on to say, if we do not love one another, we are not children of God.”³

In v.14-15 John speaks of it in terms of *passing from death to life* and of having eternal life:

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

If you are a believer in Christ, your sincere love for the brethren is evidence that you have **“passed out of death into life.”** It is evidence that you have **“eternal life”** abiding in you!

3 *Life in Christ*, p.336

John Stott writes,

“Let the world hate; we do not hate but love. Moreover, the fact that we love our brothers gives us a good ground for certainty that we possess eternal life.”⁴

What an encouragement this should be to every sincere believer in Christ! We are often tempted to look for mountaintop spiritual experiences or some kind of sign gift to serve as evidence to bolster our weak sense of assurance of salvation. But that is *not* the way to attain genuine assurance.

What does the Scripture say? If we hold to the truth of Christ, seek to sincerely (although imperfectly) obey God's commandments, and genuinely love our brothers and sisters in the Lord, this is all the proof that we should look for in order to assure our hearts that we are truly children of God and possessors of eternal life in Christ!

May the Lord work in us what is pleasing in His sight, that we might grow in our love for the brethren, and so also grow in our sense of assurance, and all to the glory of God. - Amen

4 *The Letters of John*, p.145