**LOVE ONE ANOTHER, Pt. 1**
1 JOHN 3:11-24

It’s a story I’ve told before, but it’s a good one…

Paul Tripp has written of himself —

“\[ \text{When I got married, I did what every other groom does. I repeated vows to my wife that said I would love her sacrificially all the days of my life. Who was I kidding? I look back and see how little I understood what I promised. What I was really thinking, to a large degree, was, This is great! I love me and now you are going to love me! My love was very shallow. It only took a few days of marriage to figure that out! God had plans to use my wife and children to show me just how shallow my love was and to help it deepen as I saw how much I needed to grow. Seeing this caused me to depend on God and his grace all the more.}\] [Lane and Tripp, Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, 151-152.]

His story affirms at least two things — understanding the nature of love is important, and secondly, many of us have an inadequate understanding and definition of love.

But understanding what love is, is not only important for marriages; it is important for all relationships and it is especially important for relationships in the church body, as John has noted in his first letter:

“\[By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.\]” (1 John 3:10)

John’s statement, “anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God” won’t receive many arguments. It seems self-evident. But then some might ask, “but what does righteousness look like?” “Well,” John says, “it’s not as difficult as you might imagine — an obvious demonstration of righteousness is a believer loving his fellow believer.”

That had to be as startling a statement in the early church as it is today — if we don’t love other believers it indicates that we are not of God. Wow.

That’s a big statement that is begging for more explanation and discussion, which is exactly what John then does, beginning in verse 11 and going through the end of the chapter (and then picking it up again in the middle of chapter 4). Here is John’s main assertion in these verses —

**AN ESSENTIAL EVIDENCE OF OUR LIFE IN CHRIST IS OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.**
What does this kind of love look like and do? John makes six assertions about love in the body of Christ in verses 11-15 — this is what believers can expect to do, what they can expect not to do, and how they can expect to be received by the world.

What can we say about loving each other in the body of Christ? We can say —

1. **An Old Command for ALL Christians (vv. 10b-11)**
2. **What a Loving Christian IS NOT (v. 12)**
3. **What the WORLD Thinks of Loving Christians (v. 13)**
4. **What a Loving Christian Is (v. 14a)**
5. **What a Loving Christian DOES (v. 14b)**
6. **What a Loving Christian Does NOT DO (v. 15)**
1. An Old Command for All Christians (vv. 10b-11)

• Why can John say what he does at the end of verse 10? Verse 11 tells us — for (because) this has been the message that the readers have heard taught since the beginning of hearing the gospel. In fact, when John uses this term from the beginning in this book, he typically means, “from the beginning of Christ’s ministry.” So, this is the message that Christ always taught.

✓ In fact, the word message is used similarly to the word “gospel” (as in 1:5), so the sense is something like, “this has always been part of the gospel message.”

✓ To love other believers is not just an application of the gospel message; it is part of the very goal that Christ had for the gospel from the beginning of His teaching ministry.

✓ Jesus makes that abundantly clear in the Upper Room before His death (Jn. 13:34-35).

✓ So this becomes another way for John to assert that the gospel has implications for how believers live — it makes demands on our lives and conduct.

• What is this message that he speaks of? we should love one another.

✓ What does he mean by love? He uses the verb love 28x in this book, but just a few verses later, John gives a clear illustration of love — v. 16. Christ willingly (joyfully, Hebrews tells us) gave up His life to accomplish our salvation. This is the pattern we have to follow. Love is a joyful self-sacrifice to meet the needs of others. We see their need and in compassion we respond.

✓ But it’s more than that. This love is also to be continual (present tense). It’s not one time. It is continual and unending. Just as Christ loved His disciples and His own to the end (Jn. 13:1), so we love each other to the end. We don’t quit (even when it is hard to love, and it will be).

✓ The love is to be reciprocal — toward each other. To love our brothers means we aren’t selective in that love. All receive it. (And we do it even if they don’t love us as they ought.)

➢ “We don’t need to be loved by others. Yes, it feels good, but it is not essential. Loving, not being loved is essential.” [John Piper]

➢ Notice also this: we know that Jesus loved the entire world — all created men (Jn. 3:16).

➢ Yet we also know that He has a particular and unique love for His people — those who are adopted as sons of God and the bride of Christ are loved differently than those who don’t have that relationship with Him. So we ought to love all people, but there is a particular and unique kind of love that we reserve for one another.

✓ Here is a summary statement of what John says it means to love: love is an unending (joyful) commitment to meet the needs of fellow believers because of my desire to emulate Christ.
• This is what believers in Christ have always been commanded to do and what they have always done. But not everyone loves that way. What should we say about them?

2. What a Loving Christian Is NOT (v. 12)

• As a negative illustration of what a believer should not do, John goes to the example of Cain. (This is the only reference in John’s letters to an OT event, so it evidently was significant to John.)

• The story of Cain is well-known and John alludes to it only briefly —
  ✓ He begins with Cain’s nature — of the evil one — that is, he belonged to the evil one — Satan.
    ➢ While Christ is demonstrated to be holy and righteous, Satan is always seen as all evil and only evil. There is nothing ever of any good to be found in him (3:8; Jn. 8:44).
    ➢ Part of John’s point in beginning with this is to indicate that Cain was not good and then became evil when he killed his brother. No, John is indicating that Cain acted out of the hardness and evilness of his heart. That reality is born out in the story in Genesis 4 —
    ➢ Cain’s offering was wrong (Gen. 4:2-5). Some have speculated that the problem with Cain’s offering was that it wasn’t an animal; that could be, but later God would make provision for offerings of grain. Further, Cain was a “farmer” and Abel a “rancher” — they were bringing what was available to them (vv. 2-3). So it seems that the problem with the sacrifice was not what Cain brought, but the manner in which he brought it (3-4a — not firstlings…). That is further indicated by the fact that after his offering was rejected by God he immediately responded in anger (v. 5b). “The heart of his problem was his heart.”
    ➢ And yet there was an opportunity for repentance. God confronts him and indicates that he still had an opportunity to master and overcome his sin. But Cain wanted nothing to do with God, God’s commands, or transformation. He wanted to worship God in His own way and so in deepening anger, he killed his brother (v. 8). The call to repentance only hardened his heart even more against God and his brother.
    ➢ Even after Abel’s death, Cain is defiant (v. 9), complaining (v. 13), and bitter (v. 14, 16). Everything about his life demonstrates the assertion of John that he was evil.
  ✓ So John moves on to Cain’s actions — he slew his brother. The word used here is specific and strong. Cain did not only kill his brother, but the word is used of butchers slaughtering animals. It indicates that Cain’s murder of Abel was brutal, violent, merciless, and cold-blooded. It was not a spontaneous fit of rage, but it was planned and carried out with particular wickedness.
  ✓ And he concludes with an evaluation of Cain — his deeds were evil. He was just like the one to whom he belonged. By nature Cain was evil, and what he did was evil. And his deeds were particularly wicked because they were committed against his brother. He killed the one he should have loved and protected. This is the connection to 1 Jn. 3:11.
• And notice John’s point about the story of Cain — this is not the life of the believer. Because the believer loves, he is not angry, defiant, jealous, bitter, hostile, and murderous towards his brothers.

3. What the WORLD Thinks of Loving Christians (v. 13)

• The believer may love other believers, but the world sure doesn’t. The world follows after Cain. Cain is a prototype of the world. This is the way the world functions: murderous hatred.
• Thinking of Cain’s actions, John notes, do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you.
  ✓ In fact, John says, “Stop being surprised.” They were surprised; they shouldn’t have been.
  ✓ The word if is translated accurately, but the sense is that there is no uncertainty that is contained in our word “if.” The better sense is “when the world…” or “that the world hates you.” It will hate.
  ✓ No believer should ever be surprised (though we almost always are) when the world is hostile to us.
  ➢ Paul warned us that persecution would come: 2 Tim. 3:12; 2 Cor. 4:7-9ff; 1 Thess. 2:14-15
  ➢ Peter warned us of coming persecution: 1 Pt. 4:12ff
  ➢ Hebrews demonstrated that it has always been this way: Heb. 11:32-38
  ➢ Jesus promised persecution and hatred from the world: Jn. 15:18-21 (right after He admonished the disciples to love one another — Jn. 15:17); Mt. 5:11-12.

• Do not be surprised if the world hates you; if you identify with Christ by loving God’s people, you will be hated by the world that hates God, just like Cain hated God and rebelled against Him.
• If you love each other, you will be mocked (at minimum) and persecuted and perhaps even killed.
  ✓ Instead of being concerned when the world hates us, we should be concerned when it doesn’t.
  ✓ Does a lack of hatred indicate that we have acquiesced to the world and we do not love and care for each other as we ought? Christ’s followers will be hated by the world and the greatest demonstration of our connection to Christ is our love for each other. If we aren’t hated, is it because we aren’t loving each other enough?

4. What a Loving Christian Is (v. 14a)

• It is hard to love each other to the point that we joyfully receive persecution. How can we do that?
  By a change in nature, which is John’s point in v. 14 — how do you know when someone has passed out of death and into life? He loves the brothers in Christ.
• The verb passed out of means to transfer or migrate. And the sense here is a permanent transition.
By the time I was 24, I had moved 7x more than 1000 miles, and multiple local moves as well. There was no permanence; but when a man is saved by Christ and God breathes spiritual life into his dead soul, he is forever (I use that word intentionally) moved out of death and into life. He nature has changed at its most fundamental level. He is different. (Jn. 5:24)

- What happened to Lazarus physically has happened to us spiritually (Jn. 11:41-44).

5. **What a Loving Christian DOES (v. 14b)**

- What is a believer in Christ? He is one who has been made alive in Christ.
- What does a believer do? He is one who loves other believers — *we love the brethren* (all of them). And he loves other believers *because* he has been made alive. God resides within him and he does the kinds of things God does. God loves His people, so the believer loves God’s people. That is his new nature as a living man.
  - That’s what he is. He is alive with a new life. And that new life loves others.
  - Love does not cause him to move from death to life, but because he has already been moved from death to life, he loves others.

- Notice that John is not specific here about what this love does (though he will be in vv. 17-18).
- As in verse 11, his point is merely that when there is the new life of Christ in a believer, he loves others continually. Cf. 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9-10. A few questions (for a body that seems to be doing well but can always grow):
  - Are you more concerned about how others love (or don’t seem to love) you or about how you can love and care for others?
  - Do you watch for others needs and how you can love them?
  - Do you persist in loving others — even when they are difficult and ungrateful?
  - Is your love an inconvenience and hardship to you? (It often will be.)
  - Is loving others a joy to you (as it was to Christ)?
  - Are you known by others as being particularly loving and kind?
  - Love is what a believer in Christ does. The epistles give 57 commands for how we are to love and care for each other, and 17 of those are to love each other. Love is what a believer does.
    ➢ John has 6 of those commands (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12; 2 John 1:5)
    ➢ Cf. also Rom. 12:10; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8.
6. What a Loving Christian Does NOT Do (v. 15)

- A believer does not hate.
  - A believer does not hate, because all those (everyone — all inclusive) who hate are murderers.
  - That doesn’t mean that everyone who hates will physically kill another person; but it does mean that to hate is to give evidence of the heart attitude of a murderer (Mt. 5:21-26, 43-47).
  - One writer has said, “Murder is in the heart before it is in the hand.” So a believer cannot be the kind of person who hates.

- This verse sees only two kinds of people: those who love and those who hate. We are one or the other; we have one or we have the other. So we can say this another way: a believer cannot be the kind of person who does not love.

- And even worse, John notes that those who hate (and murder) do not have eternal life abiding in them. There is presently in one who hates no spiritual life. That’s the condition of a hateful person (and John was talking about real people in these churches).
  - One who presently lives in an attitude of hatred of God’s people, not repenting of his sin and not fighting against the temptation, is giving evidence that he has no eternal life.
  - But this is not entirely hopeless. John does not say that there is no possibility of repentance and forgiveness. All sin can be confessed. Paul himself is an example of the availability of forgiveness (Acts 26:9-11).

- A lack of love is the evidence of spiritual death. And a believer will not remain in a condition where he intentionally, without repentance does not love others.
  - The person who does not love is living in death (v. 14).
  - The person who hates and murders does not have life in him (v. 15).
  - If that is a description of you, there is hope. And the hope for you is the same hope for all men — Jesus Christ who has satisfied God (2:2). You cannot stand before God without condemnation, but if Christ is your Savior, He has satisfied God for you. So I beg you to confess your sin — your anger and hatred and rebellion — and find God to be a gracious God who will forgive.
  - Don’t be like Cain who continued in rebellion when forgiveness was offered…
CONCLUSION:

You may say, “I can’t love; it’s too hard.” Understand the person who wrote this book was John who was called “the son of thunder” for his powerful personality (e.g., Mk. 9:38). Yet at the end of his life he was called “the love apostle.” No apostle wrote more about the importance of biblical love — the Christian’s love for Christ, Christ’s love for His church, and love for one another.

In fact, at the end of his life he was particularly frail —

Jerome says in his commentary on Galatians that the aged apostle John was so frail in his final days at Ephesus that he had to be carried into the church. One phrase was constantly on his lips: “My little children, love one another.” Asked why he always said this, he replied, “It is the Lord’s command, and if this alone be done, it is enough.” [MacArthur, Twelve Ordinary Men]

If this is what the Lord can do to a thunderous, impetuous, bold, zealous, ambitious man like John, it is also what the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit can do in you. In His gospel He has called us to love one another, and with that gospel He equips us to do that very thing.