

BY THIS WE KNOW LOVE  
(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2018)

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**Scripture: Genesis 4:1-16; 1 John 3:9-18**

**INTRODUCTION**

There is no shortage of sermons and messages concerning love. It is not a neglected subject. Now, we do realize that many if not most of the messages are not Biblical. The love that is exalted is not the love of God but the love of man. We must recognize that there is a Biblical love and a worldly love.

Now in recognizing this truth, we have to be careful not to downplay the importance of love and the call to love.

We have observed that perhaps the key verse in 1 John is 1 John 1:5.

**1John 1:5** ¶ This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

The holiness of God is at the heart of 1 John and indeed of all of Scripture.

Another key theme in 1 John is love, *agape*.

The verb *to love*: 28 times in 1 John. The noun, *love* (agape): 18 times in 1 John. In a relatively short book, love is mentioned at least 46 times. There is no missing this theme in 1 John. If 1 John 1:5 is a key verse for the book concerning the holiness of God, then I think we can also say that 1 John 3:16 is another key verse concerning love.

It is easy to memorize the reference. We know John 3:16 is a significant verse describing God's love. 1 John 3:16 is a beautiful parallel.

**1John 3:16** ¶ 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.

I mentioned again last week that 1 John can be challenging to outline.

I have chosen as our text following the outline of Robert Yarbrough, verses 9-18.

This is probably not how your Bible has formatted these verses in terms of paragraphs.

Now, taking verses 9-18 is not an inspired division, but one argument for looking at these verses as one section is that there is a pattern than John presents in these verses that is very much at the heart of Scripture.

From the very beginning there is the way of life and righteousness and the way of sin and death.

You are either a child of God or you are a child of the devil.

How the world hates such a binary division. But this is what the Scriptures teaches.

In verses 9-18, we see John presenting this binary division in three related ways:

9-10: Two paternities – children of God and children of the devil

11-12: Two options – way of love and the way of Cain

13-18: Two paths – The path of life and love and the path of death and hatred

I will be presenting five points concerning love and hatred from 1 John 3:9-16.

#### **1) GOD'S WORK OF REGENERATION IS THE BASIS FOR TRUE LOVE, VERSES 9-10, 14-15**

Last week we looked at some challenges in 1 John in terms of how we understand verse 6 and the statement – **whoever abides in Him does not sin.**

We have a very similar statement in verse 9.

**Whoever has been born of God does not sin.**

I shared last week that there are three types of solutions in terms of explaining what John means in these verses.

There is a **grammatical** solution based on the tense of the verbs. Some understand that John is saying that a believer no longer habitually sins. This understanding is based on the present tense verbs used in verses 4, 6, and 9.

Some propose a **theological** explanation of various forms: deliberate, habitual sin vs. involuntary sin, or the difference that we see in 5:16-17, or that John is speaking about what is possible rather than what is actual.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Smalley, 161.

Another approach is to explain this in terms of the **context** or **situation** facing John and his readers in terms of false teachers and those who were following them. The Christian does not sin in the way that John especially warns against in this section, joining league with the antichrists and with the devil. The sins that John specifically might be highlighting are those of doctrine (2:22), ethics (2:4), or love for God and love for others.<sup>2</sup>

Now there is some overlap in these positions, though there are differences.

Anytime you are studying a passage, there might be questions, things unclear to you. We have to be careful to not let what we don't know overwhelm what we do know. Don't let the unclear dominate what is clear. We should focus as much as possible on what is straightforward.

What is clear in this passage and for John is that God's work of regeneration is the basis for true love and obedience. There is nothing in 1 John that would ever indicate that love is the way to salvation, that you can just love your way to God.

John Calvin wrote very importantly of verse 14:

But when the Apostle says, that it is known by love that we have passed into life, **he does not mean that man is his own deliverer**, as though he could by loving the brethren rescue himself from death, and procure life for himself; for he does not here treat of the cause of salvation, but as love is the special fruit of the Spirit, it is also a sure symbol of regeneration. Then the Apostle draws an argument from the sign, and not from the cause. For as no one sincerely loves his brethren, except he is regenerated by the Spirit of God, he hence rightly concludes that the Spirit of God, who is life, dwells in all who love the brethren. But it would be preposterous for anyone to infer hence, **that life is obtained by love**, since love is in order of time posterior to it.<sup>3</sup>

So what is John's point in these verses?

First, he is identifying that there are those who belong to God and those who belong to the devil. How do we know the difference? Those who belong to God have been regenerated by God and they show this in their actions – in the way that they live and love.

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<sup>2</sup> Yarbrough, 183.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, s.v. 1 John 3:14.

Those who belong to the devil also show that they have not been regenerated. They show this in their unrighteousness and lack of love. Does this mean that we can always easily identify children of God vs. children of the devil? I don't think John is trying to say it is always easy to spot the difference. Indeed, there are those who pretend. There are also believers who have been genuinely born again but are not living always as they should.

John is helping his first century readers and us today deal with the fact that there are people who are deceptive, manipulative, and cause great trouble and yet still try to claim the name of Christ.

Now, although I don't think this is John's main point here, we can make another statement based on what John has said.

Since God is the source of true love in our own lives and for others, when we are convicted of our lack of true love, **we must turn to God and seek His strengthening and grace.**

Further this we must always say. If there is any good in us, any love for God, any true love for others, then this is God's sovereign work in our lives.

Look at verse 14 – we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.

You can see here John is not saying you pass from death to life by loving the brethren. How can anyone pass from death to life? Only because of God's sovereign work in making you alive and making you part of His children. So, all the praise and glory must be given to God alone. Let us forsake any praise or esteem that we would give to ourselves.

## 2) THE WAY OF CAIN IS NOT FAR REMOVED, VERSES 11-12

In verse 11, John uses the word message.

This word **message** is used only two times in this letter in 1:5 and here. The phrase **from the beginning** is also used again in verse 11, a phrase used 9 times in 1 John. John is repeating here one of the central messages given to all believers which is the command **to love**.

The phrase **love one another** is found 11 times in the NT.

Now Jesus three times gave this command.

Paul in Romans 13:8 stated,

**Rom. 13:8** Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Another interesting passage is 1 Thess. 4:9.

**1Th. 4:9** But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

So, John is saying that the command to love is essential and foundational. It is not the gospel message, but all those who have embraced the gospel must embrace this command also.

Now we might ask the question, why is the command to love emphasized so often?

The answer is that the way of Cain is not far from us. Though the believer has been given new life, we now have the ability to love God and to love others, but we recognize that in ourselves, we are not far from Cain.

Cain is only mentioned three times in the NT. The writer of Hebrews speaks of Cain in Heb. 11:4. And Jude 11 also speaks of Cain.

**Jude 11** Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

John says in verse 12 that Cain murdered his brother. You could translate the verb murdered as brutally murdered or slaughtered his brother.<sup>4</sup>

Now how many of us would compare ourselves to Cain? None of us would want to be identified as being like Cain. But the reality is that in our own hearts, the way of Cain is not far from us.

Jesus made a similar point in Matthew 5.

**Matt. 5:22** But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

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<sup>4</sup> See NET Bible note, s.v. 1 John 3:12.

So when we hear the call to love, let us always be reminded that it is not in our nature to love as we are called. Rather the way of Cain is the natural path for us.

### **3. TRUE LOVE BRINGS THE HATRED OF THE WORLD, VERSE 13**

As I have mentioned, and I am sure is obvious to you, 1 John has many connections with the words of Jesus. This is not a surprise.

As we think of the words of Jesus from Matthew 5 we consider two passages that are not contradictory at all.

**Matt. 5:16** Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

It is never in vain that we serve the Lord.

And yet we know that true love and service for our Lord also brings the hatred of the world.

**Matt. 5:11** "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

So what John writes in verse 13 is both something Jesus already stated and is something that should be obvious.

When you experience the hatred of the world it can shock you.

We shouldn't marvel, we shouldn't be surprised, but it doesn't mean that this is easy for us to experience.

Here we consider how many countless lives have been lived for the sake of Christ and have ended in dying for Christ.

The list is so immense.

We have been insulated from much of this, but the truth of this verse has been proven over and over again.

### **4. IT IS MUCH EASIER TO LOVE WITH OUR LIPS THAN WITH OUR ACTIONS, VERSES 17 AND 18**

In the final two verses of this section, John powerfully illustrates a truth we know too well just looking at our own lives.

It is much easier to speak in loving ways than to fully act in love.

How does the love of God abide in us if we refuse to help those with real needs?

We might ask the question, were there more needy believers at the time of John or are there more today?

I don't know if we can answer this question.

One thing today that we have is an awareness of how so many Christians around the world suffer today as the gospel has spread and as communication allows us to know what is going on around the world.

On the other hand, you know that in John's day there were probably many very needy Christians who didn't live hundreds or thousands of miles away but much closer to home.

It certainly the case that we cannot help every single needy Christian we meet or know about.

So, what can we do?

The Bible does give both subjective and objective guidance in these matters.

What do I mean by subjective? I mean that the call to give is not always identical for every believer. God has blessed some with more and they have a greater duty.

Objectively, I believe that God's standard is that the believer would give generously and that God has established the tithe as the basic guideline for giving.

And the tithe and offerings that are given allow for you to bless many and help people around the world through a local church primarily and also as the Lord leads you to give to others.

It should also be emphasized that when we give, we give ultimately to God which means that even small gifts can be acts of true service for the cause of Christ.

A story is told of a young child given two dollars by her father. She could do anything she wanted with one dollar and the other dollar was to be given to God on Sunday.

The girl happily took the money. As she made her way with visions of what she would buy with her dollar, the wind blew one of the dollars out of her hand and into the storm drain.

The little girl responded by saying, “Well, Lord, there goes your dollar.”

Do we say the same sometimes?<sup>5</sup>

Look again at verse 18.

John uses two pairs of words – word or tongue and deed and truth.

It is an interesting pairing.

It might be best to understand that John is making a comparison and contrast here.<sup>6</sup>

Your tongue is what produces words. As important as words can be in some cases they are not sufficient.

On the other hand, in this context, truth is what should produce in your life loving actions.

Rather than manipulation or emotion, it is the glorious truth of the gospel and the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ that calls you to His service.

**Love in action according to God’s truth.**

## **5. BY THIS WE KNOW LOVE, VERSE 16**

I close with what I would say is the central verse in this section in terms of love.

Here is a portion of the gospel message and its application in terms of love and giving.

John speaks a lot about knowing in this letter using two different but similar verbs.

John states we know love because of what Jesus Christ did in laying down His life for us.

What is significant that John uses the verb **laid down** and not **died**?

Laid down means what?

It indicates that Jesus’ death was both sacrificial and voluntary.

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<sup>5</sup> *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, 159.

<sup>6</sup> NET Bible, s.v. 1 John 3:18.



As one study Bible notes: “Jesus was always completely in control of the situation surrounding his arrest, trials, and crucifixion.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus was not just a victim to the powerful forces of evil of His day. He willingly gave His life.

And we know that He gave His life not for those who deserved that He do so.

It certainly is a beautiful testimony to read about those in the armed services who die or suffer to save their fellow soldiers.

The testimony of the USS Pueblo Crew is an amazing story still 50 years later. Dec. 23, 2018 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its capture.

The 82 members who survived the capture were horribly treated, not surprisingly.

In one particular example, 13 of the sailors were required to sit in a rigid manner around a table for hours. Afterward a North Korean guard came and brutally beat the man in the first chair. The next two days the same thing happened.

Knowing that the man could not survive, another young sailor took the place of the first man.

When the door opened, the guard beat the new victim senselessly.

For weeks each day a new man stepped forward to receive the beating. At last the guards gave up. They could not beat this kind of sacrificial love.<sup>8</sup>

Without in anyway discrediting these acts of love and courage, we know that what Jesus did was far more than just take a bullet or beating for his close friends.

He died for ruined and lost sinners who in their natural affection would only love to hate.

**This is the call given to you.**

Lay down your life for the brethren.

A pagan Greek writer named Lucian who lived in the next century after the NT wrote this of the Christians he knew.

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<sup>7</sup> NET note, s.v. 1 John 3:16.

<sup>8</sup> *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, 226-227.

“It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator [Jesus] has put it into their heads that they are brethren.”

And Tertullian, who lived also in the second century to the start of the third century said:

It is our care for the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness that brands us in the eyes of our opponents. ‘Look!’ they say. ‘How they love one another! Look how they are prepared to die for one another.’<sup>9</sup>

What would be said of us?

Can you think of where you are failing in this command?

### **CONCLUSION**

Two points to consider in closing.

Compare book of Ephesians with Rev. 2 and the letter to the church in Ephesus with what we have in 1 John 2.

In some cases churches change for the worse.

Have we lost our first love?

**By this you know love.**

Think always of Christ. It is not a worldly softness or sentiment. It is not detachment, coldness, duty. It is sacrifice and strength without limit.

**Prayer**

**Hymn 473**

**BENEDICTION: JUDE 20-21**

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 225.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.