

## HOW YOU LOVE OTHERS is HOW YOU LOVE GOD

Part of the Series: Abiding in Jesus – A Study in 1 John

1 John 3:11-18

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Hey everybody, it's great to be here with you this morning, opening God's word together with you. If you were here last week, Brandon kind of set me up a bit to go. As we were leaving the building last week, I told him my sermon today was just going to be one sentence. Just one sentence. I told him that I was going to have a mic drop moment. Here it is...are you ready? Here it is:

How you love others is how you love God. That's it. How you love others is how you love God. Let's close in prayer. Just kidding. I do want to unpack that a bit this morning. And maybe it's not something that you've ever thought of before...but how you love others is how you love God.

On my desk at work, in my classroom I have one of those pinch pots made in the shape of a turtle. I look at it every day. Sometimes students will ask me what it is. I'll tell them and then they'll ask, "How can you tell?" And I'll say, "Well, it's green, and it has a head and a tail, and some feet." They kind of look at me funny like, why are you holding on to that piece of junk? I can respect that thought. I get it. I mean, it hardly looks like a turtle. If you tried to compare it to the Statue of David or something like that, it doesn't even compare. Artistically speaking, it's not very good art. If it's not very good art, why do I have it? Why does it matter to me? The answer is on the bottom of the sculpture. When I flip it over, there are two letters: C & T. Those are the initials of my son Caleb. Caleb made this for me when he was in Kindergarten. I love this thing he made me, not because of the artistic quality of what he made, but because HE made it. And because I love him, I love what the gifts that he gives and the things that he makes.

Think about it this way: could you imagine, when he gave me this little turtle pinch pot, he comes up to me and says, "Dad, Dad! I made this in school for you. Here you go," and I say, "Well, I guess I'll take it, but it's not very artistic. It hardly looks like a turtle...but thanks...I think." That's horrible! No, I love this thing because I love the one who created it.

What does this have to do with anything? How you love others is how you love God. Or, let's put it another way: What you think about the creation reflects how you feel about the Creator. John tells us as much in 1 John chapter 3. If you have your bibles open up to 1 John chapter 3 and we'll pick up at verse 11.

*<sup>11</sup> For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* John tells us that loving one another is the message we have been told from the beginning. This isn't new. Can we all agree that the world would be better if people all were more loving? Hundreds of songs have been written about this. It's all over bumper stickers. I

have yet to meet anybody that says, “The world is too loving...I want it to stop,” right? Can we all agree that if people were more loving, the world would be a better place?

John reiterates what Paul says in countless places in the New Testament like Romans 13:9 when he says, “all commandments are summed up in this word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul is summarizing Jesus when he says in Matthew 22:39-40 when he says that the entire law and the prophets can be summarized in loving God with all you are and loving your neighbor as yourself.

A lot of times we tend to think this is just a New Testament thing, but John and Paul and Jesus are expounding on what Moses said in Leviticus 19:18. So, the bible is pretty clear, at its most basic message is that we need to love one another.

This isn't where we struggle though, is it? If you're a parent here, you may be familiar with what I call the Law of Diminishing Obedience—the idea that the more times you tell your kids to do something, the less they actually listen to you. We have a great time agreeing to being more loving – and we hear about it all the time in the bible, but where we struggle is actually abiding in this. We all can agree that people need to be more loving, but we have a hard time abiding by it.

Love is both a mark of and a test for a Christian. How do you know you're a Christian? By your love. Jesus says as much in John 13:35-36 – “*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. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” How do you know your growing as a Christian, that you're being sanctified, that the Holy Spirit is shaping you into someone who is more like Christ? You love others more today than you did when you first became a Christian.

Just to be clear: this is not optional. The way we love others reflects the love we have for God. Loving others is not something we get to opt out of if we call ourselves Christians. I'd like for us to stop at this point and I'd like to do something together. For just a few seconds, I'd like you to look around at the people sitting here with us this morning. If you're at home, take a look at the people next you. I think it's important for you to see something about the people you just looked at. First, we need to see that the people around you are real people. Okay, obviously they are not holograms or anything like that. But oftentimes when we're talking about loving people, we like it in theory, we like the concept of loving others, but when we're actually called to apply that love to others, it gets difficult.

Second, none of us in here are perfect. Every single person in this room and every single person streaming at home has a certain type of brokenness. We are all sinners with different backgrounds and personalities. Third, we are called by God to love the people that you just looked at. We're even called to love people outside of this room. Not just those who are polite to us. Not just those who are loving in return. We are called to love just as God has loved us...and what do we know about God's love for us? God forgives sinners and continues to love

sinner in spite of their struggles with sin. This is what we're called to do also. Some of you have issue with others right now, and you need to get right with them because that's what loving them is.

And this is what John does next. He contrasts the way of the world with the way of Jesus when it comes to loving others, and ultimately shows us that we can't separate the way we love God from the way we love others – those two things are inherently connected. The mark of a Christian, the thing that distinguishes a Christian from the rest of the world is love. Look at verse 12: *"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. <sup>13</sup> Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."*

John gives us a case study in the world's way here. John brings up the story of Cain and Abel. If you remember this story, Abel is a herdsman; he works with animals, and Cain is a farmer; he grows crops. One of the ways God calls them to worship him is that he asks them to bring their first-fruits. This concept of first-fruits is the idea that God had commanded from the beginning for people to set aside a portion of what they make or earn or harvest or produce; their first portion of that as a way to honor God by recognizing that He has given them the ability to earn, make, produce whatever it is. It's an understanding that everything we have, that everything we own, and in fact, even the ability to acquire those things...all of it is a gift from God. It's not that God needs this, right? It's all God's to begin with. But in the action of presenting our first-fruits, we recognize that it's all a gift from God and we honor him with a portion of it. God first, and the best for him.

Genesis tells us that while Cain and Abel were presenting their first-fruits to God in this family worship service, God looked at Cain and rejected him while he looked at Abel and accepted Abel. As a result, Cain got very angry and as a result he rejected God's counsel to deal with his anger, and took it out on his brother Abel by killing him. Now, this wasn't some arbitrary preference that God just liked what Abel brought to the altar more than what Cain brought. The problem was in Cain's heart, not what was in his hands. In Hebrews chapter 11, if you want to look it up later when you get home, it says that Abel brought his offering with a heart of faith and devotion to God, but Cain's goal was to manipulate God. Cain was trying to get God's blessing by trying to buy God off – not out of faith, love, worship, and trying to earn God's love—which is only available by grace.

Why does John bring up this Old Testament example? He brings this up because this is a perfect example of the world's way to interact with other people. What's in your heart matters. It's not just about what you say that counts or even just what you do that counts. What's in your heart matters, especially when it comes to your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ. One of my favorite examples to use with this concept is this. You may have heard me use it before, but here goes. Let's say that tomorrow, I decide to surprise Meriah, and I come home with flowers. And she's super thankful and she's going on about how

beautiful they are. And when she thanks me for them, I just say to her, “Well, I just felt like I had to. You know, you keep the house clean and you cook really good food, and I don’t want that to stop, so I felt like I was supposed to do that for you.” Do the flowers mean anything after that? No.

What John wants us to see here is that what we bring, especially here in this meeting, and to this table, our hearts matter. We don’t just get to go through the motions with others, because that means we are going through the motions with God. So, have you come in this morning with a self-righteous attitude? Did you come out of a place of jealousy, unforgiveness, or malice, or hate for someone else this morning? What have you brought in your heart to worship today?

John highlights this in verse 13. He writes: *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.* See, God’s way for us to love one another is to love each other in the same way we have been loved by God. It’s a love in spite of the other person. It’s a love that continues even when they have given you every reason not to love them. But that’s not the world’s way. The world love’s BECAUSE OF. The world’s love is earned. So John says that we shouldn’t be surprised when we love people the way God has loved us and people hate us for it. Why? Because it upsets their system. Because it’s counter-cultural. People who chose to follow the world’s way are so entrenched in this system that loving them God’s way calls out the inadequacy of their version of love – it calls out how their own system of love isn’t really love at all. Here’s an example: Meriah and I watch this TV show on ABC called Fresh Off The Boat. It’s about this teenager who is a first generation American who moved with his family to Orlando because his dad had immigrated from Taiwan started a business there in Orlando. The show has a running gag in it where the mom will call her sister on the phone and say all of these nice things to her over the phone, but then it will have subtitles explaining what she really means. So, she’ll say, “I hope you’re enjoying your new house, it’s so quaint.” And the subtitles will say, “I think your new house is smaller than a shoebox.” Or another way, when I first moved here, I regularly had people say to me, “Oh bless your heart.” I didn’t realize that they were really telling me that they thought I was stupid.

But that’s the world’s system. Cain is a model of the world’s system. Abel didn’t do anything to justify Cain’s anger, and so we shouldn’t be surprised when the world hates us for our love the same way Cain hated Abel for his love and devotion. I mean, have you ever tried to deliver the truth in love on social media? You want to talk about a hot-bed for the world’s system...look no further than social media. So, John says we shouldn’t be surprised if the world hates us, but our response is to continue to love others, even those that hate us the way Jesus loves— because here’s the kicker: how did Jesus love us? While we were his enemies...when we hated him or were indifferent to him, he died for us.

John continues—verse 14: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*” How many of you have seen your love, compassion, regard, and empathy for others go up the longer you’ve been

walking with Jesus? I know that's true in my life. Some of you are like, "Yeah, I kinda see it Russ." Well, you can imagine where I was. John says that's one of the marks, one of the tests of true faith in Christ; that as you continue walking with Jesus, you will love others more. Here's the thing: life doesn't produce death. God didn't take up residence in your heart so that you could go on perpetuating the world's system of love. Death produces death. Life produces life. If God's life is in you it will produce God's life through you and the result will be his love coming out of you.

Remember earlier how we mentioned that the heart matters? John is saying that the heart of murder begins with a heart of hate. Jesus says this in Matthew 5:21-22. He says, *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry (this word means hate) with his brother<sup>21</sup> will be liable to judgment; whoever insults<sup>21</sup> his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell<sup>21</sup> of fire.*

I want to ask you this morning, who do you hate? Maybe you're saying, well, I don't hate anyone. Ok, but aren't there a number of ways to murder someone? Have you ever murdered someone's reputation – or wanted to, by taking the worst day of their life and making it look like that's just an average day for them? Have you ever wanted to murder someone's business; by wanting to take someone down financially? How do you speak to people? Do you bring life with your words, or do you bring death? Maybe we haven't ever physically assaulted someone, but Jesus says that if we seek to murder someone through this form of vindictive vengeance, we do not have eternal life abiding in us. Maybe it's not even vindictive vengeance...maybe it's just indifference. Who is that person in your life that you couldn't care less what happens to them, you don't pray for them, you don't have any concern for them? You have a sort of passive vengeance for them – that they are dead to you?

John says that this is the world's way. The world's way says, "I'm fine with you, we're all good as long as you keep telling me what I want to hear. We're good if you keep living up to my standard and my expectation of you."

Ok, how does God want me to love others? What does it look like to live the way of Jesus instead of the world's way in how we treat people? John tells us in verse 16: *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.<sup>17</sup> 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?<sup>18</sup> Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

John tells us that we have a model, a pattern to follow. If we are going to choose to reject the world's system of love and care, we have to then choose to look to Jesus as a model for how we treat others, for how we love them. The way of Jesus is sacrificial. True love gives. It's being willing to take a loss so that others can experience a win. Sacrificial love means caring for others at the cost to yourself. Let me ask you some reflection questions for a minute – some things to ponder here: how do you spend the bulk of your time? Because you know what that

tells me? That tells me what you love. Where do you spend the bulk of your money? Because that tells me what you love. We prioritize what we love. If we are going to be serious about following the pattern of love that Jesus set for us it means caring for others at a cost to ourselves; it will cost you something. It will cost you time, resources, money, energy...but the love of Jesus gives.

John uses the example of caring for those in need. We should look at the needs of others, and if we have the resources or ability to help them, John says, if we have the love of Christ in us, if we've been changed by him, we will help them. If we have the ability or the resources to help someone who genuinely needs it and we refuse to help them, we don't really have God's love. Love gives.

Our hearts direct where we spend our time and how we spend our money. And so just like Abel in the Old Testament, when we recognize that our time, our ability, and our resources are all gifts from God, we recognize that there's a correlation between our heart and what we give. What did God give us? He gave us himself. The model for this, the pattern is Jesus. God gave us himself in Jesus Christ. What more could he give? Wasn't this the ultimate sacrifice? The bible tells us that he who knew no sin became sin so that we might be children of God. People, if we have to be a bit uncomfortable so that we can help someone, if loving this way costs us a little bit? So what? It's not even close to the way God has shown his love for us. We can begin to even come close to the blessing we have received in Christ. It's amazing that God says, to us "I've given you an inheritance in the my kingdom – I've made you a child instead of an enemy – I've given you freedom from sin and lived and died and rose from the dead to accomplish that for you," and our response to people when they have legitimate, tangible needs is "I don't know if I can find the time for that."

Our last thought this morning: verse 18: <sup>18</sup> *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.* It isn't complicated. Remember when you were a kid, and you were taught that you have to give the bigger scoop of ice cream to the other person and you should take the smaller one? This is like that. It isn't complicated...it just isn't easy. Love is not a sentimental feeling that only exists on hallmark cards. It requires action. It's not about what you say, it's about what you do.

We'll end with this: an old friend of mine used to say this: "You don't have to like everyone, but you do have to love everyone." Love doesn't mean being polite. Love doesn't mean having a sentimental feeling for people. Love doesn't mean you need to be buddies with everyone. But love DOES mean that you need to actively pursue what's best for people by blessing them, speaking truth and life to them and giving of yourself to them. That's how we have been loved.

Let's pray.