

Christian Love

I John 3:16-20

Last week we looked at John challenging us to identify who we serve. We saw that he used the words “children of God and children of Satan” telling us that there are two different mindsets. And as children we are disciples or students from one of these two sources. The question remains, “Whose classroom are we dwelling in today?”

We also saw that love and obedience are connected. Jesus made numerous references about obedience and love. Those who still allow a life of habitual sin to rule their lives disobey God and show either a lack of love for God, or too much love for the things of this world to give it up.

But we also saw that there is tension between those who do what is right and those who choose to remain in their sin. John gave us the example of Cain and Abel. Abel’s offering to God was received because he showed faith, trust, or a belief in God.

Cain went through the actions of obedience, but he obviously lacked faith or love for God. Cain came with an ulterior motive. We don’t know exactly what it was, but we do know that God’s rejection of his offering caused him to take it out on his brother. God warned Cain by telling him that his attitude was on the brink of stepping into sin, and that he needed to be sure that sin did not control him, but that he should control sin.

Those who remain in faith will find favor with God, but those who ignore their relationship with God, will find sin in their lives. There is nothing to stop them from stepping over the line.

Yet, because we are called to remain obedient because of our love for God, the world will dislike what they sense or feel. Cain’s hatred for his brother drove him to kill. Why? Because what Abel did made Cain feel jealous, unappreciated, or dejected.

When the church lives with God in their presence, the hope and peace, the blessings of God, the life changing power of God, causes the world to feel jealous, unappreciated, or dejected, which will cause them to respond. It always seems to be the individuals with the most guilt, the most sin, the most jealousy and dejection that become the most vocal about their dislike for the church.

But John finally told us to prove our Christianity by our love for one another. He doesn’t want us to lash out at people and tell them what is wrong in their lives, he wants our lives to be a living testimony of what God is doing in us.

This morning I want to continue by looking at **I John 3:16-20** and look at “Christian Love.” Let’s begin by looking at **verse 16**:

We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us. And so we also ought to give up our lives for our Christian friends.

1. Real Christian Love

We know what love is because of what Christ has done for us. The term "know" here can be defined as "to understand, to feel, or to be sure." The death of Jesus has given us understanding as to what love is, we know what it feels like because it has been done for us, and we can be sure that Jesus' actions are actions that we ourselves should take and apply to our own lives.

In **John 13:1** we read:

Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father. He now showed the disciples the full extent of his love.

Jesus knew that Judas had already betrayed him, he knew that the disciples were going to deny that they knew him, yet he still chose to show his love for them. This is the story of our lives today. God knows how our lives will pan out. He knew that we were going to disappoint him and fall into sin, yet he still chooses to show the full extent of his love.

Romans 5:8 tells us:

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

We know what love is, because it has and continues to be modeled to us. We know what it looks like and what it feels like because we are recipients of this great gift. Now we are being called to respond. To take what has been modeled to us and applying to our own lives. The apostle Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:17**:

But even if my life is to be poured out like a drink offering to complete the sacrifice of your faithful service (that is, if I am to die for you), I will rejoice, and I want to share my joy with all of you.

Paul saw his life as a sacrifice for those in the church, and for those who needed to hear the Good News. Just the mere mention of the word "sacrifice" makes us want to pull out our life calculator and start adding up our time, our resources, and our flexibility, and then to respond "I'm already giving what I want to give", or "I've given up to much to give any more."

Sacrifice isn't only about giving up ourselves for the sake of someone else, but it is also about overlooking the wrongs, the things said or done to us, and yet still choosing to love those individuals despite what they have done or continue to do.

2. Our Purpose in Life

John tells us, since Jesus has showed us what real love is, and that we have been the recipients of that love then we ought to give up our lives for our Christian friends. The term ought here in verse 16 means "to be indebted, to be bound, or to be under

obligation.” John is telling us that we have to respond. It would be selfish of us to take in all of God’s unconditional love and unmerited favor and yet hold conditions over the heads of those we have been placed together with in the body of Christ. We are indebted to God, we are bound to each other, and obligated to give what we receive.

But John also tells us in verse 16 to “give up our lives” which in the Greek means to make our whole purpose in life the love of others, laying aside our own desires and wants. The love of God has no room for retaliation, jealousy, gossip, or opinions, but it makes room for forgiveness, acceptance, truth, and encouragement.

Church we need to get past our preconceived ideas, our opinions, our hurts, and begin to embrace each other based on the example given to us by Jesus. Our whole purpose in life is to effect and love people, and we will never be effective as long as there remains attitudes of mild judgement, or spiritual supremacy. May we heed the words of Paul in **Romans 12:9-10**:

Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

Love means that we be sincere and obvious, undisguised, staying away from hypocrisy. Love shows genuine affection, which is translated in the Greek as having a family bond - a love that brings value to each other and to the relationship. We can't continue to be conditional any more, we need to respond. **Ezekiel 33:31** was a warning to God's people:

So they come pretending to be sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them. They express love with their mouths, but their hearts seek only after money.

The time has come for us to stop looking good, and allow our heart to live good. The only way this can take place is when we live out our Christian love.

John continues on in **verse 17** and gives us an example of real Christian love. It reads:

But if one of you has enough money to live well, and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help – how can God's love be in that person?

A similar scenario is written in **James 2:15-16**:

Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well" – but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

3. Active Love

It is not just enough to speak kind words of concern and affection. Real love requires action. Real Christian love shows itself through our time, money, and possessions. We live in a society where we store up things for ourselves. People buy things and store them away in their homes, or in their garages. Things that people will never use for others.

We have money that we put away into savings accounts, or we spend money just as fast as we can collect it, never being able to relinquish some to help those in need. Today time has become a valuable commodity. The term "Money is time and time is money" rules our thinking, causing us to cut people out of our time, making room for more financial security.

John is telling us this morning that love is not merely talked about but lived. In fact in verse 18 he says:

Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.

As a spiritual parent to the church he calls his children to respond. He knows that we need to respond in love, otherwise we do not show the love of God in us. But John continues in verse 19-20 and says:

It is by our actions that we know we are living in the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before the Lord, even if our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

4. Actions Show the Existence of Truth.

If we don't see actions of love, concern, service, commitment, thanksgiving, encouragement, or any good deeds, then we either don't understand or embrace the truth of Scripture. We either take the words of God and ignore them because it doesn't fit our agenda, or we simply aren't learning. **Hosea 4:6** tells us:

My people are being destroyed because they don't know me.

Church, we are either getting to know God, or life just seems to be more important to us. Our ignorance becomes our destruction. So, if God is teaching you and showing you things, then your life should be changing because of God's truth. There are many Christians who don't change – they don't grow simply because they have lost the desire to grow or have found life challenging enough, or maybe because they don't think they need to grow any more. May we never be arrogant enough to think we don't need growth.

If you are growing in your knowledge of God, then action will soon follow. **II Peter 1:10** tells us:

So, dear friends, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Doing this, you will never stumble or fall away.

Our effort proves we belong to God. Paul told Timothy in **II Timothy 2:15**:

Work hard so God can approve you. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

When we properly APPLY (Action) truth God will approve of us. And when we apply truth and have God's approval, we will have confidence.

5. Truth that is Lived Out Produces Confidence.

John said in **I John 3:19** we will find confidence when we stand before God. Applied truth gives us confidence in doing the right thing, being a child of God, in having hope for the future, in seeing Jesus face to face. The more we learn the more we apply, the more we apply the more confident we can be in our reward.

We read in **I John 2:28**:

And now, dear children, continue to live in fellowship with Christ so that when he returns, you will be full of courage and not shrink back in shame.

We have covered this portion in I John earlier in our series.

The truth of God produces a love for God and his people. A love for God and his people produces actions or obedience and righteousness. And as we remain obedient, producing fruits of righteousness, we can have confidence in our reward.

In verse 19 in our passage this morning John also makes a statement that I know speaks to our fears. He says, "even if our hearts condemn us" pointing to the fact of a wavering or uncertain condition in our conscience.

6. God's Evaluation is Greater Than Our Conscience.

Have you ever struggled with what to do or not to do in a certain circumstance? Have you known someone who needed help, yet you were afraid of enabling them to continue to live in their sin? Maybe there was a situation when you wanted to have the best response yet you felt like you completely blew it.

There will be times in our lives when our conscience will keep bringing up questions, or thoughts of "you should have done this or that." When it comes to loving people what does it mean? Does it mean you give \$5.00 to the alcoholic standing out in front of the liquor store begging for money? Or does it mean that you enable an individual to bring words of condemnation over and over again?

The heart will condemn us at times making us feel like we didn't do enough or even question our motives. Our conscience at times beats us up, yet our motives were for the best.

John tells us this morning that God knows your true intentions. He takes everything into consideration. If our response was done with pure motives, God sees it. If we really didn't mean to hurt someone's feelings or enable them to continue to live in sin, God doesn't hold it against us. Even if our conscience condemns us, God knows our true motive. **Romans 8:1** tells us:

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

Condemnation can be defined as blame, doom, or never ending disapproval. Condemnation leaves no room for forgiveness or restitution. Our hearts condemn us and remind us of how inadequate we are. But God wants us to respond to conviction. Conviction can be defined as admitting the truth thus causing us to change our belief, and being convinced that God has something better for us.

God wants us to respond to conviction. He wants us to do the best we can, with the information that we have, with the right heart and motive. As we love others God expects our best effort and he know when we are giving it.

Conclusion

So this morning, John tells us that we need to have real Christian love - a love that has been modeled to us by Jesus. Jesus gives us the full extent of his love despite what lives looks like, despite how we have lived in the past, despite how we will fail in the future. We are to give the full extent of our love this morning despite how we have been hurt, despite our opinions or evaluations of individuals.

John tells us that love is our purpose in life. We are indebted, bound or obligated to love each other simply because of the love that has been shown us. We are to have genuine affection or in other words, a family bond between us. It is not something that we can simply talk about but is something that proves itself through action.

Calling up someone to see how they are doing. Seeking to help those who are in need. Praying with those who need to hear God. Speaking to those who need words of encouragement. Love that plays itself out. It is obvious, undisguised, sincere, and real.

And when we are able to love each other it proves to us that we have allowed God, through the power of His word, to change us, and to grow us. And when we see what God has done, we can have confidence in who we are as children of God. We can have confidence in the hope for the future and the eternal prize.

Don't let your heart or conscience condemn you. Don't let all the "I should have's" weigh you down. Just obey God and his word, seek his direction and discernment and make the best choices you can. Then God, who can see your heart and motives, will evaluate your actions. He will then either approve or bring conviction. Our hearts can be deceiving at times. But if we follow truth we will be sure to do what God wants of us.