

1 JOHN 3:11-18

INTRODUCTION

Most people would agree that the real hallmark of true Christianity is love. But the truth is that people mean different things by that term love. People think it means being tolerant of everything and everyone so that we never object to any action or any teaching. Others think it is about having feeling of compassion for others. But when we look at the bible we see that true biblical love is all about giving of ourselves to others.

Let's remember this book is giving us a series of tests that will prove whether we are true children of God. It is a book that is written so that we can be sure of our salvation. However I am sure it also has another effect upon us. It is a very challenging book as it exposes our hearts and exposes just how far short we are in demonstrating the fruit of genuine Christianity. Many of the tests that we have faced so far in this book we might have passed Ok but often if we are honest we do not pass these tests with flying colours.

Just take the previous sermon for example I said that we could tell if we are true Christians by our attitude to sin and to Jesus Christ. If you tested your heart as I tested mine then you might well conclude that although we hate sin we don't hate it as much as we should, and although we do grieve over it, we do not grieve over it as much as we should. When it comes to Jesus, we like him are anti sin, but we are not as opposed to it as we should be. So it is an assuring book as long as we pass the various tests but I'm sure you will agree it also challenges us. No more so than when it comes to our next test the test of love.

1. THE TEST OF LOVE

Now the key verse in this section is verse 14. The test that we have passed from death to life is love for our fellow believers. Now notice that this is the complete oppose of physical life. We are born into this world and from the moment we are born we are moving from life to death. But in the spiritual dimension we are born in sin and therefore we are born spiritually dead, and when we are born again or born of God we then move from spiritual death to spiritual life.

But of course anyone can say that they have moved from death to life. The false teachers said that, so how do you know for sure. Well as I have said the whole book gives us a number of tests but here is a key one. When you are spiritually alive you will love your fellow Christians. This is a teaching that is at the heart of the gospel, when those in the church of John's day came to faith then one of the first things they heard was the need to love one another (v 11).

This is because God is love (4:8); and therefore when we become true Christians God by his Spirit comes and lives within us and, therefore, our lives will display something of God's nature (3:9).

A loveless Christian is a contradiction in terms. This is why Jesus said that this is a mark of a true Christian (John 13:34-35 & 15:12). I often meet people on door-to-door work who tell me they are Christians but they are not one of these Christians who go to church? They worship God in their own home they say. But actually the very fact that they don't go to church and have no desire to do so is a mark that they are not Christians. How is staying at home when a Sunday service is on a mark of love?

We would never say that we love our family but we just don't go and see them or speak to them even though they live just down the road. But that is exactly what such people do who claim to be Christians and yet never meet with God's people. Notice also that John says, "we know" this mark is something that if we are showing in our lives we can clearly say we are Christians. Not in a boastful sort of way but we can humbly know that we belong to God that we are his children by the love that we have and show for our fellow believers.

Just in case someone is not clear about what John says he states the opposite (v 14) anyone who does not love other Christians is only demonstrating that they are still dead spiritually and that means that they belong to the devil (v 10). Now although we know that a true Christian is one who loves fellow Christians we still need to determine what we mean by love. For as I said love is used in so many ways today that we need to define what true biblical love is.

Well John does it in two ways he tells us what it isn't and then applies that to us and then he tells us what it is and once again applies it to us.

a) True Love Is Not Found In Going Way Of Cain (vs. 12-14). Who did Cain belong too? We are told that he belonged to the evil one and the result of his relationship was that he murdered his brother Abel. Actually the Greek is not as polite as our English translation for it actually says he 'butchered' his brother. But why did he murder him? Because his actions were evil but his brother's were righteous. John's point is to show what failure to love's one brother can lead too.

Now John is taking an extreme situation in order to highlight his point. He is not saying everyone who does not love will end up murdering people but his point is that when someone is dead in their sins, and belonging to the devil they will hate those who are righteous and have the potential within them to murder if that hatred festers and the right opportunity arises. The story of Cain and Abel teaches that lesson. Abel obeyed God made the right sacrifice and as a result it was acceptable to God. Cain disobeyed God offered what he wanted not what God wanted and God rejected his offering.

As a result he became jealous of Abel and killed him. What made Cain and Abel offer different sacrifices? The answer is found in Hebrews 11:4. It was faith. Abel trusted God's word and offered what was acceptable whereas Cain did not offer what God required because he did not have faith. It all has to do with faith. To put it another way it all has to do with whose family you belong God. Either you belong to God or the devil; whatever family we are in means that we will display that family likeness.

Now true biblical love is not found in such a person who does not display faith and who does not obey God and as a result they oppose those who do display faith and obey God.

John now draws his conclusion (vs. 13 & 15). We ought not be surprised if the world hates us who believe because Cain is a picture of all in our world who oppose those who are righteous, those who hate Christians are therefore guilty of committing murder in their hearts. Such a person does not possess eternal life and is not a Christian. It is clear that the false teachers who left the church are not demonstrating love and are therefore not true believers. In fact they are of the world and their actions show that they really hate the believers even though they claim to be Christians.

We see this don't we in the lives of good living respectable church going people. Such people claim to be Christians but press them about the claims of Christ and they will soon oppose the true Church of Jesus Christ even to the point of hatred that leads to murder through assassination of character. So now that we know where true biblical love is not found let us look at the opposite.

ii) True love is found in going the Way of Jesus (vs.16-18). Now having demonstrated the negative side John now turns positive and shows us what true love is. It is going the way of Jesus Christ. But what is his way? We are told that Jesus Christ laid down his life for us (v 16). This is true love; it is seen in self-sacrifice on behalf of others. True Christian love is selfless, it is self-giving and it does so for the benefit of others.

Now John applies this truth and says that we should follow the example of Jesus and lay down our lives for our brothers. Now John's application is specific it is the brothers that he says that we are to be prepared to lay down our lives for.

Of course the bible tells us that we are to love unbelievers but that is not his point here, he is thinking of true faith in Christ being demonstrated by love for fellow Christians. But let us just think of the love of Jesus Christ for us. It was love that brought him into this world, but love for who? For us of course. But did we deserve that love?

No we did not; in fact we deserved his wrath and judgement, we are sinners in rebellion against God yet knowing this he still loved us with a self giving love and demonstrated that love for us by coming into this world. That would be amazing enough but his love went further than that. It went the whole way to the cross where he bled and died so that we could be forgiven, and reconciled to God the Father. He dies that we might benefit through his grace and mercy towards us.

This is true love. Now John asks would we do the same? Would we give our life for others? Well that is not exactly the question; the question is would we give our lives for our brothers for those that we are related to through the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course we might all say of course we would knowing full well that such a situation is so unlikely to arise. But the question still stands, as a challenge to us, is our love for our fellow believers such that we would willingly lay down our lives so that our fellow Christians might benefit as a result.

We need to examine our hearts on that one, but that is exactly what it means to love our fellow Christians. However John knowing that it is unlikely that most of us will ever have to put our love to the test to that extent states clearly how that sort of love is worked out in our everyday lives (v 17). Here is a situation if we have material possessions which we all do have and we see our brother in need would we have pity on such a person?

What does John mean by 'pity' is he thinking of some compassionate feeling? Absolutely not, he is thinking of having pity to the extent that we will help meet that persons need. If we do not have that sort of pity then how can the love of God be in us? So here is the test do we have self-sacrificing and self-giving love for others? The sort of love that will give in order that our brothers and sisters in Christ might benefit.

Can you think of occasions when you did something about the need of a fellow Christian? Let me try and apply this to us further. This type of love will give of one's time for the benefit of others believers. We have seen this is very practical ways during the building renovation in our church. Time has been given sometimes time that no one else knows about but time given so that God's people could benefit. Time can be given in visiting others especially when our fellow Christians are struggling with illness and other ailments. Time can be given to those who are lonely and in need of some fellowship and good company.

Time can be given to the meetings of the church so that others will benefit. You know we don't just come along to the various meetings of the church so that we will benefit from it. We do I trust benefit from coming to church but if we love our fellow believers we will come in order that they might benefit from our presence. We might benefit by your contribution in prayer on Wednesdays or by our informal fellowship with one another.

Far too many Christians see church only for their own benefit and therefore they come and go, as they like. But that is not demonstrating true love that is selfishness. When we fail to come to church for no good reason we are failing to love our fellow Christians by our presence, we are not self giving we are not truly loving as we should. .

This is the type of love that will give of our resources to meet the needs of others. This means that we will give of our finances so that others will benefit. It might be giving directly to our church so that we can maintain the ministry and the building. That benefits God's people in so many ways. Then there is the giving to God's people in other countries that have so little is the way of basic necessities of life. We are all very wealthy compared to many other parts of our world; yet we give so little to help our fellow Christians in other parts of the world.

Then of course we can give our resources to help those Christians in this country who are finding it difficult to make ends meet. I could go on and list a whole host of ways that we can demonstrate our love for fellow Christians but I think I have given you sufficient examples. John finishes off this section with an appeal (v 18). We are

not to love with words only that is so easy to do. Anyone can say that we love others. But true love is expressed in actions, actions that are guided by truth.

So have we passed the test? True love is not something that can be worked up within us; God places this biblical love in our hearts when we are converted (Romans 5:5). But it cannot stay in our hearts it will be expressed in actions. A heart that truly loves fellow believers will have no problem in finding ways of expressing that love, it will find an abundant ways of doing so the most important thing is that it is in our hearts in the first place. Is there evidence of that love for other Christians in your heart and mine? If so then that is the evidence that we are Christians. That love might be obscured by our own unconfessed sin but if you are a Christian it will be there; and will be expressed in some way to others.

However let me say should you fail the test it means that you are not a Christian and therefore you oppose Christ and given the opportunity will oppose Christ's people. If that is you then you need now to move from death to life and this is done through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus.

As I finish let me ask you once again are you dead or alive (v 14)? If you are alive then let your love be demonstrated for we are to love not only with words but also with actions (v 18).

Amen.