

In Deed and in Truth

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Preacher: Colin Horne

[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3 and we'll be reading verses 11 through 17.

And this is the clear word of God. This is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another. Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

And you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

[1 : 20] And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Let's hear this word preached. Siblings need to be reminded often of how to treat each other, especially siblings who are small.

Stature. Don't throw the toy at your brother. Help your brother clean up the toys. No, don't yell at your sister.

Talk to her calmly and kindly. All kinds of ways in which parents remind their children of how to treat one another. And of all of those scenarios that we could list and we could go on for a lot of time together, it really can be kind of boiled down to one truth.

Love one another. Love one another. Love your brother. Love your sister. Whatever it is that you're doing now, however it is that you're treating your sibling now, that's not showing your sibling love.

[2 : 35] That's a lack of love. Siblings need to be reminded often of how to treat each other. And not just siblings in a family, a physical family, but siblings in the family of God.

That's what we see in our passage this evening. Brothers and sisters in Christ need to be reminded often, love each other. Now this isn't the first time that God has given this exhortation in 1 John.

It's actually the third time. John just keeps circling back on this theme. We saw it in chapter 2. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light.

And we saw it at the very end of the passage that we were just in a couple weeks back. Chapter 3, verse 10. By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil.

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. So both passages, they follow this same logic.

[3 : 45] Those who know God, those who are born of God, will live like it. There will be integrity in their lives. There will be a consistency between who they say that they are and then how they live their lives.

The hypocrite claims one thing, says one thing, and then lives differently. So how about us? Is there consistency?

Does how you live back up your profession of faith? And tonight, John shows us one way in which we ought to live that does demonstrate the reality of who we are.

We love each other. That's the central focus of our passage tonight. Children of God love one another. So this is where we're going to be going together.

This is how our passage breaks down for us. We are going to see the message. And we're going to see the motivation. And finally, we're going to see and really camp on the danger. The message, the motivation, and the danger.

[4 : 50] It is not a perfect alliteration, but it will work. So let's start with the message. Read with me again verse 11. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

John says this is the message. We've heard that before from John. John, it's shorthand for I have something really important to say to you.

Remember, these letters were often read in a very public fashion. And so it's almost as though as the letters being read, John is saying, okay, if you've tuned out as this letter has been read, please come back in, focus back in with us now, because here's the crux of the matter.

Here's what we're driving at. Here is a really important point that I want to make. So listen up. This is the message. It's kind of like when Paul, in his letters, will sometimes say, the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

It's kind of this buzzword phrase, perk up, listen up. I've got something important to say. It's really something that we can grab a hold of, that we can carry with us.

[6 : 03] You're in conversation with someone. You're seeking to share your faith with an unbeliever. Here is a short, memorable statement that Paul or John has given us that we can pass along.

For Paul, it was things like, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I'm the foremost. For John, it's saying things like, God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

That was in chapter one. Now, it's love one another here in chapter three. Those are the statements. Those are the messages that are memorable, and they capture so much of our faith in a single sentence.

So someone at work makes a comment about how terrible the world is, or how one political party is ruining our country. You can easily bring to mind John's words. That's true.

The world is a very dark place. There's much evil around. There's much evil in my heart. But I know this to be true. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

[7 : 07] Short, memorable statements that John gives us here in his letter. And so this is the second one. This is the message, chapter one. This is the message, chapter three.

And these messages connect. John isn't giving us two messages that are entirely separate and distinct from each other. It's one message.

The message from chapter one now carries over into chapter three. He's layering these messages. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

That's the message. Now, John tells us here in chapter three, this is how the message is going to work itself out in your lives. If it's true that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all, and you now are those who are born of God, how does this play out in our lives?

And it demands from us that we love one another. 1 John 4, verse 21 sums it up very nicely for us. And this commandment we have from him.

[8 : 16] Whoever loves God must also love his brother. So if God is light, and you are of the light, because you know him, you've been born of him, then you will walk in the light, and you will walk in the light by loving one another.

There's nothing new here. It's the message that we've heard from the beginning, John says. John likes to talk in his letter about the beginning.

Back in chapter two, verse 24, John said, let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. You see what you've heard from the beginning. It is this. God is light. There is no darkness in him.

And if what you've heard from the beginning, meaning from the time that you heard and believed the gospel, if this message truly abides in you, if it settles deep down into the crevices of your heart, then you will live out this message.

You'll love one another. And when John says you'll love one another, he means your brothers and sisters in Christ. So God's word is narrowing our focus tonight.

[9 : 23] This message, it concerns how we treat one another in the household of God. This is like a special family meeting that God has called for us together.

Children of God, gather in. God has a word for how we are to treat each other. Of course, the Bible speaks of loving those outside of Christ as well. Love your neighbor as yourself doesn't have the qualifier that your neighbor must be a Christian.

Love your enemies certainly implies that your enemies are not in Christ. But here tonight, our passage is talking about a particular bond, a special bond that we share with one another.

We love our brothers and sisters in Christ. So that's the message, love one another. Let's see the motivation to obey that message.

And the motivation comes by way of two examples. One example is negative, and then one example will be positive. So let's look first at the negative example. Read again with me verses 12 to 15.

[10 : 27] 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 brothers righteous.

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. So we've heard a message from the beginning.

And now John is taking us back to the beginning, basically, of scripture. He's taking us back to Genesis 4. It's the account of Cain and Abel. Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice to God than Cain had.

And God looked with favor on Cain's, on Abel's sacrifice, and he rejected Cain's sacrifice. He had no regard for it.

[11 : 32] But what John is most concerned about, for our sake, in this passage, is how Cain responded after the rejection of his sacrifice. So in Genesis 4, God came to Cain.

And God said to him, Why are you angry? And why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.

Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it. So Cain was at a crossroads here. Anger, bitterness, rivalry, hatred.

All of these sinful desires were bubbling under the surface. How will Cain respond? What will he do about it? Well, he acted on what was in his heart.

He did what was evil. And so instead of love, there was hatred. Because his own deeds were evil, and his brothers were righteous. He hated his brother, and he killed him.

[12 : 38] If there was ever an example of how not to love your brother, that's the epitome of it. Cain was of the devil. He was given over to his sin.

Just as the devil has been sinning from the beginning. And by his lack of love, Cain showed that he abided in death.

That he had no spiritual life. So John says in verse 14, whoever does not love abides in death. Then he just inverts that idea in verse 15.

You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Because a murderer is not loving his brother. A murderer is hating his brother to the utmost.

So that's the first example. It's negative. Now let's look at the positive. The second example that John gives to us. Verse 16.

[13 : 36] By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. So a negative example.

It can only go so far. We can talk about all of the ways that Cain had failed to love. But if all that we knew was how Cain hated and how Cain murdered, we would be left asking, but what does love look like?

What then does it look like to love one another? Okay, I see how not to do it with Cain, clearly. How then do I love my brothers? How do I love my sisters?

How do I love my sisters? John doesn't just give us a positive example. He gives us the positive example. When John says, by this we know love, he means, by this we know what love looks like.

Here is love on display, and it's on display for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. He laid down his life.

[14 : 40] He willingly went to the cross for you. Jesus died for those filled with hate. Jesus died for murderers.

Jesus died for sinners such as us. And so sinners like us could then pass out of death into life, John says.

That we might then be raised from spiritual death and given new spiritual life. And so then we are called to love as Christ loved us.

So John says, love one another. And then he gets even more particular and more specific. Lay down your life for one another. This is what Christ has done for us. Now, we do that for each other.

We sacrifice for the good of one another. We love in tangible, real ways. Because we have new hearts.

[15 : 40] We have new desires. We have new affections. And there's a measure in which this then assures us. We indeed are children of God because he's given us these new desires, these new affections, these new ways in which we want to then live out our lives.

Back in verse 13, John said, Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. Well, of course the world is full of hate. The world has not passed from death to spiritual life.

But we have. And so we should look more and more like Christ. And less and less like the world. We should love one another, not hate one another.

So we've been given these two examples to help us. One took the life of his brother. The other gave up his life for his brothers.

So we've been given this motivation to obey the message, love one another. Now, let's spend some time considering the danger. Verses 17 and 18.

[16 : 50] 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?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. So this here, this is the danger that we are to avoid.

To speak of love, but to not act in love. To talk about love, but then to not live out love.

It's not that words and deeds are at odds with one another here. We could maybe get that impression. That's not the case. They're not in opposition to each other.

What's at odd with one another is empty words. Versus words that are full of love. It's empty talk of love. Versus a real showing, a real demonstration of love.

[17 : 53] We can love with our words, just as we can love with our actions. Scripture teaches us that how we speak matters.

Our words matter. So when someone shares a prayer request, and you talk with them about that prayer request, and you seek to comfort and to encourage, that is loving with your words.

And then when you follow up a week later, and you ask them about that particular request, how has the Lord been answering? That is loving them with your words. When you point out to someone that you see Christ formed in them, that is loving them with your words.

When you look at a brother or sister in Christ, and you seek to encourage them, to build them up, that is loving them with your words. What does Ephesians 4.15 teach us?

Speak the truth in love. And Ephesians 4 goes on to say in verse 29, Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

[19 : 03] So our words matter. What we say matters. This is not pitting our words against our deeds. With the words that come out of our mouth, we can sin against one another.

With the words that come out of our mouth, we can give grace to those who hear. We can tear down. We can build up. We should love with our words.

So the danger here is when we speak of doing that, but then we don't. If we truly love one another, it will show in how we treat each other, with our words and with our deeds.

So this is true of both examples that were given. Negatively with Cain. Positively with Christ. Cain showed his lack of love by how he treated Abel.

There was hatred in his heart. And it showed as he murdered his brother. Christ showed the fullness of his love by how he treated us. He went to the cross.

[20 : 03] He bore our sins in our place. So when we talk about love, but we don't act in love, John is cautioning us against a mere outward show.

It's the idea of talking heads. You talk, but there's no real substance. You talk, but you don't do anything. This is our perpetual complaint about politicians.

They talk, but they don't get anything done. John is saying, are you guilty of that? Are you guilty of talking as though we love?

But then we don't actually do it. What does Paul say in Romans 12, 9? Let love be genuine.

Or how about 1 Peter 1, 22? Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.

[21 : 05] Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. So is your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ sincere? Do you love one another from a pure heart?

Do you have a heart that is open to your brothers and sisters? Or are you closing up your heart, as John says? Listen to his words again in verse 17.

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?

So this is an evidence of our salvation. This is an evidence that God's love abides in us. We love each other. We don't close off our heart to each other.

So keep your finger in 1 John 3. Flip over in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 15. Deuteronomy chapter 15.

[22 : 05] We need to see the relationship here between these two passages. Deuteronomy 15. These are the words that God spoke to Israel in Deuteronomy 15.

And these words that he spoke to Israel are all over our passage in 1 John 3. I'll begin reading in verse 7. Deuteronomy 15, beginning in verse 7.

If among you one of your brothers should become poor in any towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend to him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.

Take care, lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart. And you say, The seventh year, the year of release, is near. And your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing.

And he cried to the Lord against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him. Because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

[23 : 24] For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy, and to the poor in your land.

So do you see how the heart and the hands are connected? God says here in Deuteronomy, Don't harden your heart and don't shut your hands.

The posture of our heart shows in how we open or how we close our hands. So if a brother or a sister is in need, we show a love that is from the heart as we have open hands to help that brother or sister in need.

So what do your hands look like? Are they tight-fisted? Thinking, I gotta look after me and myself here. I gotta look after me first.

I gotta be concerned about myself because I have needs here. I gotta be careful. I gotta make sure I take care of me first. Or are your hands open? Ready to give?

[24 : 33] Ready to help? Ready to serve? All right, kids. Hold up your hands for me like this. You don't have to go too high here, okay? Kids, you don't have to go too high. All right.

Now, close your hands like this and do a fist. Okay? Now, kids, I want you to think about this. Say your mom or dad, your grandparents, your teacher, whether in Sunday school or at school, they need your help.

Kids, your mom says to you, Could you open the door for me? What do you think? Having your hands like this. Is that gonna work very well? No. Or maybe your teacher says, Could you pass out these papers?

And you go to grab your papers. I can't get these papers. I can't do that. It would be very helpful with our hands like this. I could actually do a lot of damage with my hands like this, couldn't I?

Yeah. We need our hands like this. Just tell me, let me see you open your hands like that. We have to have open hands if we're gonna help those who are in need. All right, kids, you can put your hands down.

[25 : 32] Don't want to keep those hands up and suddenly you don't have any blood flow there. So we need to remember the negative example of Cain that's been given to us.

Don't be like Cain. Cain hated his brother and murdered him. So John gave the most extreme example possible to us. A murderer to show us what it looks like to not love.

And maybe you think, I haven't murdered anybody. I haven't gone to that length. And then John says, everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.

And some of us probably are quickly thinking of Jesus's words from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said, you shall not, you have heard that it was said of old, you shall not murder.

And whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. But then maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking, I don't really have anger towards my brothers and sisters in Christ.

[26 : 41] I don't hate my brothers and sisters in Christ. Even unbelievers. There are very few people that come to mind that I think of that I'm filled with hatred towards them.

But sure, there are people that I don't get along with. There are people I would rather not be around. But hate, that is a strong term, to hate someone.

When we think of hatred, we think of this deep-seated anger and hostility. We think of the person who is road-raging when we think of anger. And so maybe it's true.

Maybe you don't have those strong antagonistic sentiments toward someone else. John is not going to let you off the hook. Okay.

You've never killed anybody. Okay. You don't hate people as we commonly define hatred. But are you indifferent? Are you apathetic towards your brother or sister in Christ?

[27 : 41] You see a need in their life. And John gives us an example of a physical need. The application here could be extended. Maybe the need that you see involves prayer for a circumstance in someone's life.

Or wisdom and counsel. Or encouragement and friendship. You see that need. What do you do? You don't murder that brother like Cain. That would be odd.

You don't hate that brother. You don't look at them and have disdain towards that brother. But perhaps you see that need. And you don't do anything about it.

You close your heart to that brother or that sister. You see the need. And you think, I'm not going to help. I'm not going to move towards them.

I'm going to do nothing to move towards that brother or that sister in love. You don't have murderous intent. You don't have a burning fire of hatred. But you are unmoved by the need of your brother or sister.

[28 : 41] Do you see how John just keeps making the circle of application wider and wider here? He is not going to let us wiggle out of this love for one another. Have you thought, I should pray for them?

But then you don't. Have you thought, I should encourage them with a text or a card? But then you don't. Have you thought, I have the resources that this person needs. I could offer to help.

But then you don't. We hate our brother when we turn away from our brother. We hate our brother by closing our heart to him. We know of a need. We're aware of a need.

And we don't know anything about that. We do nothing about that need. So what does our hatred look like? It's this subtle, cold indifference that creeps into our hearts.

I would rather keep my life than lay it down for a brother. We can make all sorts of excuses to not help our brothers or sisters in Christ.

[29 : 45] The people of Israel were guilty of making excuses too. Maybe you were wondering about this. Back in Deuteronomy 15, we read one possible excuse that the Israelites would have given.

They would say, the seventh year is near. What does that mean? Well, in the civil laws that God gave to Israel, every seventh year, debts were canceled.

So if the seventh year was near and a brother needed some financial help, there was this temptation to say, I can't help them because the seventh year is near.

And so if I lend to help this brother out, it's possible that they won't be able to pay me back before the seventh year arrives. And so I'm going to lose that money that I lent.

And I can't afford to do that. So the seventh year is near. I'm not going to help them. That's the excuse in the Israelites' mind.

[30 : 44] But God didn't call it an excuse. He called it an unworthy thought in their heart. Or maybe even your translation says, harboring wicked thoughts.

That is a strong, strong way that God puts it. He said, take care, lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart. And you say, the seventh year, the year of release is near.

And your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother. And you give him nothing. Unworthy thoughts run counter to living a life that is worthy of the gospel.

So what are the excuses that we make? Maybe you can relate to some of the ones that I really easily came up with because of my own excuse-making heart. I don't have time.

My life is too full. I have many kids. That brother probably doesn't need my help. They might not want my help. Maybe I'll offend them by offering to help.

[31 : 48] Someone else is far more qualified than I am to help in this situation. I don't really understand all the details of the situation. So I'm not really sure how I can help.

All kinds of excuses that we can make to convince ourselves to keep ourselves from opening our hands, to keep our hearts closed to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But are those excuses really valid? Or are they unworthy thoughts that we're harboring in our hearts? Are they wicked thoughts that we're harboring?

Now there are certainly many times that wisdom is needed. Can I meet this need in this person's life? Is it within my capability?

Do I have time? Do I have resources? Modern technology has enabled us to know of needs not just in our church, not just in our community, but truly all over the globe.

[32 : 51] And we obviously can't meet every need. Resources and time don't allow for it. So yes, wisdom is needed. We need God to give us that wisdom.

We also need God to give us that sincere brotherly love. Because those who love from the heart, they open wide their hands to their brothers in need.

So we need to ask God for wisdom. We need to ask him also to grow us in our love for one another. What did we hear this morning? God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

And what is the fruit of the Holy Spirit? But also love. God give us love. We don't need to ask for that and then say, if it be your will.

That is something God grants to us. He desires to give to us greater love for one another. For many of us, we also need to recognize that those brothers and sisters in Christ may very well be in our households, in our families, believing husbands, believing wives, believing children.

[34 : 07] We don't just love the fellow Christians in our local church or fellow Christians in our community. We love our fellow Christians in our families. Sometimes we forget to do that.

And we get all caught up in loving and helping and investing in everyone else except our very own family members who know the Lord. We're called to love them.

So husbands, love your wives as your sisters in Christ. Husbands, love your wives, love your husbands as your brothers in Christ. Love them.

Don't overlook them in the name of loving other brothers and sisters. So this is the message tonight. Love one another in deed and in truth because those who know God will love as he does.

And this is an assurance of our salvation. The love that we have for one another reminds us that we belong to Christ. Christ. And the love that we have for one another shows the world that we belong to Christ.

[35 : 21] Jesus said in John 13, 35, by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. So we make known to all people that we are Christ's disciples by our love for one another.

We testify to the world of the transformative work that God has done in our hearts. True, sacrificial, self-giving love is not natural.

It's not common. It's not ordinary because it requires resurrection power to possess it. God must raise the dead in order for the dead to love like this.

We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you so abundantly thankful that we are your children, that you have shown your love to us in the greatest way in sending your son to die for our sins, that you have loved us in that you have now brought us into your family.

You've made us your children. You've given us an inheritance. Father, help us now to live in light of who we are. We thank you for your word, that your word so clearly spells out in such practical terms what that love looks like.

[36 : 51] Now help us to live in that manner. Help us to not close our hearts to one another, but to love each other with open hands. Father, we cannot do that in our strength.

And so we ask that you would give us that love in greater measure, that your spirit would be at work producing that fruit in our hearts. help us to love, help us to lay down our lives as your son laid down his life for us.

And it's in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.