

# Love: A Matter of Life and Death

1 John 3:10-15

Some time ago, a young woman wrote a tender love letter to her boyfriend whom she had left for another. **"Dearest Jimmy, No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie. P.S., And congratulations on winning the five million dollars in the state lottery!"**

Love is in demand. The words, **"I love you"** invoke powerful warm feelings. Love is the theme of songs, poetry, stories, books and movies. Love is in demand because the world is full of hatred, violence, cynicism and strife. Unfortunately some churches and Christian groups are known more for strife than love.

Over and over, some 46 times in this letter, John writes of love. To John, love is serious business. It is a matter of life and death. John teaches us that there is a level of love known by believers that is not available to the world. Let's evaluate our "love lives" by asking and answering the question: *Am I Living in Love?*

## **I. Am I Living in Love? (vv.10-15).**

### **A. Love is Righteousness in Action (v.10).**

**In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.** (1 John 3:10 NKJV)

John classifies people in two contrasting groups: **"children of God"** and **"children of the devil."** All our actions result either from our kinship with God or with the devil. The way we live shows what family we belong to. When Christians do not **"practice righteousness,"** they are producing fruit from the wrong family.

Have you ever heard someone say, **"Don't go against your raising"** or **"I didn't raise you to act that way?"** When I was growing up, sometimes I would try to change my mother's mind when she said "no" to something I wanted to do. I'd say, **"But Mom, so and so gets to do it."** My mom would respond, **"Yes, but I'm not so and so's mother now am I?"** I have said the same thing to my kids. Our behavior needs to be in keeping with the character of our family.

The character of God's family is **"righteousness."** How do we know if we practice righteousness? Last time we saw that a righteousness life is one that does not continue to live in habitual sin. But righteousness is more than just the absence of sin. Righteousness is really being filled with love. The song says, **"They'll know we are Christians by our love."** Love is where the rubber hits the road. Righteousness lived-out is love. Love is righteousness in action.

### **B. Love is Basic to Christianity (v.11).**

**For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another,** (1 John 3:11 NKJV)

1. The "**message**" or heart of Jesus' teaching is that we are to "**love one another.**" "**From the beginning**" of our walk with Christ, from the moment we were saved, the Holy Spirit of God has been teaching us to love one another.
2. Paul wrote in 1 Th.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.**"
3. Rom.5:5 says, "**...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**"
4. Most people equate love with affectionate feelings. This is why people can be married for years and "fall out of love." Often the feelings pass and so the commitment is gone as well.
5. Real love is not just based on feelings. Biblical love is concerned first with your decisions not your affections. Love first has to do with what you decide not how you feel. Real love begins with your will and then moves to your feelings. This why we can act in love toward people we don't even especially like. Because love is something we do, not just something we feel.
6. It doesn't matter how much we go to church, how much biblical knowledge we have, how much we pray or how many ministries we may be involved with if we fail to "**love one another.**" A failure to love disqualifies everything else we may do.
7. 1 Cor.8:1 says, "**...We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.**" This is why 1 Pet.1:22 says, "**...love one another fervently with a pure heart.**"
8. Because loving one another is the primary mark of true Christianity, the enemy expends a great deal of effort trying to cause believers to fight, quarrel and grumble against each other. He tries to divide Christian marriages, relationships and churches.
9. One of the great challenges of any fellowship of believers is to keep the love alive. If we are not careful church will become just a place where we go--not a relationship of love that we have with one another.
10. Let's read **Mt.22:35-40**.

35 **Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,**

36 **"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"**

37 **Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'**

38 **"This is the first and great commandment.**

39 **"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'**

40 **"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."**

The "**lawyer**," an expert in the Old Testament scriptures, asked Jesus, "**Which is the greatest commandment in the law?**" (NIV). There were some 613 commands in the OT. Jesus said the first was to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. The expert in the law didn't ask for the second greatest commandment, but Jesus gave it anyway. Why?

You cannot measure the first without the second. *We can only measure our love for God by our love for his children.*

11. Our problem is we measure our love for God by our feelings. If we are moved by the worship music, by singers, by a good sermon and get some tingly, warm fuzzy feeling, we think we are loving God. A feeling is insufficient evidence.

12. Jesus said in Jn14:21, **"Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me"** (NIV). Jesus can't command our feelings but He can command our actions. He commands us to love people.

### **C. Love is Contrasted by the World (vv.12-13).**

**"not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you."** (1 John 3:13 NKJV)

1. John now gives us the example of **"Cain"** the first human being to hate and the first to **"murder."** You can read about him in Genesis 4. Cain, he says, belonged to the devil, that's why he murdered his brother Abel.

Maybe you remember the story, how the two brothers each brought offerings to God: As a farmer, Cain brought some of his crops and as a rancher **"Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock."** Genesis says that God looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but that on Cain and his offering the Lord was not pleased...and that infuriated Cain. God warned Cain that his anger was eating away at him, that his anger was opening the door for sin to pounce on him, but Cain refused to listen. So as his anger festered into envy and resentment, Cain took his brother out in the field and murdered him...brother against brother...the very first homicide in the Bible, the first murder in human history. Cain's murder of Abel is a story of anger which led to hatred, which led to murder. Because Cain had not done right in his offering to God he was not right with God. And because Cain was not right with God, and refused to repent and do the right thing, his anger led to murder.

2. Why did Cain murder **"his brother"** Abel? He couldn't blame the environment because the world was unpolluted. He couldn't blame society because there were no other people. John says Cain **"murdered his brother ...because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."**

3. Cain murdered Abel because Cain was evil. If you don't love your brother it is not because there is something wrong with him, but there is something wrong with you!

4. Are you living in love or seething in bitterness and hate? Are you living in character with your family? Jesus told the religious Pharisees in Jn.8:44, **"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning..."**

5. Jude 11 speaks of those who corrupt themselves. It says, **"Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain..."** When you decide not to love a brother or sister in Christ you have **"gone the way of Cain"** and sin lies at your door.

7. **"Murdered"** is from a word that has violent overtones. It means "brutal slaughter, to butcher." And you might be thinking, "well, I could never do something like that." But look at what Jesus said in **Mt.5:21-22**.

21 **"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'**

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.**

8. In v.13, John says, **"Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you."** John equates Cain with the world, and says that followers of Jesus shouldn't be surprised when the world hates them like Cain hated his brother Abel. The world often resents those who are righteousness. Did you ever despise a "goody two shoes?" The world hates true believers because we are the conscience of the culture.

**D. Love is Evidence of Genuine Conversion** (vv.14-15).

**We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.** (1 John 3:15 NKJV)

1. In v.14, John says, **"we know."** It means "we know as a fact." **"We have passed"** comes from a word that means "crossed over." It was used to describe a person who emigrated from one country to another. Jesus said, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."** (John 5:24 NKJV) We cross over from death into life when we hear the word of the gospel and believe in Him. And love is the proof.

2. Loving other believers is the primary evidence that you have been born again! Love is the first fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:22) and the greatest of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor.13:8,13). In John's vocabulary life, light and love fit together, as do death, darkness and hatred. Back in chapter 2 John said,

9 **He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.**

10 **He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.**

11 **But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.**

3. Love reveals the genuine Christian. We recognize an apple tree by the fruit hanging from its branches. We recognize a peach tree when we see its fuzzy fruit. We know a genuine Christian not by what he says but by how he loves. We see the fruit of love hanging from the various branches of his life.

Our capacity to love each other reveals the fact that we've truly come out of the spiritual darkness and hatred of the world, the hatred of Cain. John knows that hatred is simply murder in its embryonic form. V.15 says, "**Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.**" Here it is again. To God hatred is the equivalent of murder. If there is hatred in your heart for another Christian, it is like mentally taking a gun and shooting him. The same hatred that leads murderers to butcher people resides in every human heart--in mine and in yours--making each of us potential murderers...at least that's the Bible's diagnosis of us. John also says, "**You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.**" This doesn't mean a murderer cannot be forgiven. Jesus prayed for those who murdered him. It does mean that the hate-filled person is not a genuine Christian.

Cain and Abel represent two radically different paths in life. Cain represents the way of spiritual death. Cain had a veneer of religion that covered a heart filled with hatred. This realm of spiritual death is the realm of Satan himself, because Satan has been a murderer from the beginning. This way of death is characterized by a lack of love, a refusal to love to others. Cain represents a world system that doesn't know Jesus Christ, a culture that refuses to come to faith in him and be transformed.

Abel represents the way of spiritual life. It was because Abel was righteous that Cain hated him, not because Abel stole Cain's girlfriend or because Abel cheated him on a business deal or because he badmouthed Cain behind his back. No...it was purely because Abel was walking with God that Cain hated him.

Our world lives in the same realm Cain lived in. We live in a world of hatred and violence, a world where relatives refuse to speak to each other for decades, a world where parents abuse their children, a world where children tote assault rifles. We live in a world of terrorism, where because of religious hatred people will murder thousands. Don't be surprised...this is life.

Verse 14 suggests that if anything, what we should be surprised at and should glory in is the discovery of love. We have passed from death to life if, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we have in ourselves an ability to love that doesn't come from us. It is a glorious thing to learn to love someone we were once unable to love, to take risks for love that we were too inhibited to take before, to forgive the family member who treated us badly, to reach across the chasm of a painful marriage and care about someone we've been hurt by and whom we've hurt, and to discover that God's love cuts through layers of hostility that have built up over years. That is John's point here. Love helps us recognize that life has been given to us.

Jesus Christ calls us to be different, to not give in to the spirit of Cain, even when we're outraged by something. Our calling is to love—to give forgiveness when it's not deserved, to show gentleness when we're verbally attacked, to show grace when we want to blow our tops. When we demonstrate our love for one another, we show how different we are from the world.

*Am I living in love?*