

**Reading:** 1 John 3:11-24

**Theme:** Loving the Jesus Way.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell would often tell his listeners to his radio broadcasts or the readers of his writings, that the world nations should live together in peace and harmony. Yet sadly he didn't apply it to his own life and treated a succession of wives very badly! John wrote of the need to love Christian brothers and sisters. We agree with this in principle, but have real problems in its outworking - summed up in the ditty "*To love the world, to me's no chore; my big trouble is the man next door!*" In v16-18 John shows us what love is and then goes on to apply it in such a way that he leaves no loophole, no escape routes, no excuses or no let offs for any believer.

Last time we saw John took us back **to the beginning** - loving believers has always been a foundation and an integral part of the Christian life. We then saw what **we are not to be** - two negatives - we are not to be like Cain and we are not to be surprised if the world hates us as believers. Then he began a contrast he will complete in the verses we look at this evening and he also shows us the contrast revealed in loving and hating - **a question of life or death**. In v16ff John shows us what love is and then, bang, says now we are to be like that and this is how! From v16-18 note 3 things concerning love:

### **1. The Recognition of Love.** (v16a)

John does not say that we are to like other believers; the command is not "*Like and get on well with them*", nor is it "*Have sentimental gushing feelings for them*". He says, as does the NT "*Love one another as believers*". I've mentioned this before, but we need to have it clear in our minds. Liking and loving and not degrees of the same thing, but they are essentially different. Liking is something natural, instinctive, part of our physical side and it

occurs without any real effort on our part. We find ourselves liking or not liking someone. It occurs at a subconscious level and we find ourselves liking, disliking a person because of things about them, what they do or are. We have not sat down, drawn up a list and come to conclusion on one side or the other! Yet loving a person as commanded here, is a very different matter, something far deeper than a superficial physical reaction. It involves the mind, the will and is a determined reaction and goes beneath the surface. It is a determination to go out of our way to do good for that one and go beyond the superficial, beyond their faults and failings or our likes and dislikes.

Why do I stress that again? Because that is the kind of love we are shown and are to recognise in Christ. We may often say “*God loves the sinner, but not the sin*”. Realise God looks beyond what we do, to who we are. It involves intelligence, it involves assessment, it involves a deeper view of us than seeing us in the filthiness of our sin. He saw us and He chose deliberately to love us and to show us His love and to treat us as if He did like us.

For us to love those we do not like, means we are to treat them as if they are those we like! The world around is good at cutting off people it does not like, ignoring and cold shouldering them, even enjoying their hurt and suffering, but as Christians that is not an option. In fact, we are given the supreme example of life, the royal example and pattern in v16a and from this we are to see, know and recognise what love is. The love which John sets before believers to show us what love is, is the love of God revealed to us in Christ - He laid down His life for us. What a statement! It is an amazing thing John wrote here.

It teaches us Jesus Christ voluntarily laid down His life in death for us and on our behalf. Jesus is God, God the Son. There in

heaven He had all the power, majesty, glory of One who is fully and totally God. The triune God saw and knew our need - the Bible says this occurred even before the creation of the world and God saw our state fallen in sin, as condemned, vile, guilty before Him, the holy triune God and we deserved only His just, holy wrath. There in eternity God set His love on a people - not because they deserved it, but because He chose to love them. For they, in their need to be with God, meant their sin needed to be dealt with. God's love didn't merely say "*Well I love you, but I'll do nothing.*" God's love moved Him to action - so God the Father sent His Son, the Son loved us so much He willingly came and gave Himself for us; He laid down His life on our behalf, in our place - He took a real body to Himself, humbled Himself, became obedient to death even death on a cross (*Philippians 2 is a lovely commentary on this*). He didn't cling to His rights or status, but He laid down His life for us.

Love must be evidenced in action - that is how we know what love is. Jesus put His love into this supreme action. Cain put his hatred into action and he is contrasted with Jesus' love in action. Yet it is a love in action that involves sacrifice and service - He did it on our behalf. We deserve nothing, but He laid down His life on our behalf, for us. Self-preservation is one of the 1<sup>st</sup> laws of physical life, but self-sacrifice is the 1<sup>st</sup> law of spiritual life. Cain's hatred in action resulted in murder; but Christ's love in action resulted in redemption - He laid down His life for us, took our sin's guilt, penalty and punishment.

We are not to sentimentalise Jesus' death as an example, as a martyr, or as a tragedy. We are to realise He laid down His life willingly, actively and deliberately to save us, to do us good and to prevent God's wrath falling on us by turning it from us and taking it on Himself (propitiation). The Lord Jesus reveals to us

what love is - it is active and in a sense, it is both positive and negative as it does us positive good and prevents negative harm. I could speak much more on this verse, but will open it up further as its truths re-occur in the rest of John's letter. Let's see:

## **2. The Reaction to Love.** (v16b)

Our recognition of love is not only for us to admire and praise, to come to know and experience personally, but it is especially for us to share and show. We know and say so often John 3:16, but do we know, say and share 1 John 3:16 in all its significance!? Our reaction to the love of God is to be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This *does not mean* we can die for someone else's sin as did the Lord Jesus. His death was unique and was the once and for all only sacrifice for sin. What John means is that we are to have the same quality of love in Christ to other believers.

We are to have a love that will cause us to lay down our lives for them. Obviously if we did this literally it will be a one-off event, but the force of what John wrote is "*we ought to keep on laying down our lives*" - as he uses the continual present tense and shows that our love is to make us continually ready, willing and able if need be to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. It does not mean we seek to die instead of another, but that our love is active, self-sacrificing, doing good, preventing harm and if necessary we would lay down our lives for those ones we love.

We were once out on a journey and we saw a lorry in front of us saying "*Dyeing is our business*" as it was a lorry for a firm of cloth dyers! Yet as believers we are to have "*dying as our business*" so that out of love for the church and for a lost world, we would love enough to lay down our lives as we share the love of Christ. Many missionaries in the past and even now realise that

could be the cost of taking God's love to the ones they are trying to reach. Here John shows us the wonderful and right reaction to the love of God in Christ, but John goes further and speaks of:

### **3. The Reality of Love.** (v17 & 18)

Some have a romantic notion of being able and willing to give their lives for other believers – a heroic notion, a grand ideal. Christian love is greater than that, for it is a realistic love and it says *“I love you enough to live for you and, if needed, to die for you.”* To live a life of love for others is no less a thing than being willing to die for them. It may seem it is in terms of sacrifice, but in reality, to live and love another believer is a long-term process and can personally cost us much more in terms of sacrifice as we have to constantly, enduringly keep on loving in an active, self-sacrificing positive Christ-like manner.

In v18 John says in so many words that we are to be real in our love. It is easy to speak of love, even to preach on it, but John and NT insist it is to be real and not theoretical. This love is to be shown to those brothers and sisters we know, rather than a faceless fellowship of believers worldwide. Our love is to be tested and known by those around us, who we rub shoulders with and they us, perhaps on a day by day, week by week basis. These are the ones we know and they are to know we love them as we show this love in action.

It is all too easy to say we love - *“words, or tongue”*, but John wants *“actions, and in truth”* (v18). In his letter the apostle James wrote 2:15-17 *“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* James also wanted us to be real

and realistic. Our love is not to be words only “*You know I love you because I tell you so, but you’ll never guess it from my attitudes and actions!*” John and the Lord Jesus wants us to show it in our real words accompanied by our actions.

A Pharisee once asked Jesus “*Who is my neighbour?*” Jesus answered in concrete terms with the story of the Good Samaritan - helping those in need, with real positive and negative actions. In Matthew 18 Jesus speaks of a servant forgiven a debt of millions, but who would not show the same love and forgiveness to a fellow servant who owed him a few pounds. If we know God’s forgiveness of our sin, of our Saviour laying down His life for us, we are to forgive others and show His love and share His love.

The trouble is we look at our own limited resources, our feelings, our pride, our patience and we can soon run out of our love, patience etc. We need to constantly marvel at the love of God in Christ for us, go to Him for fresh and constant supplies of His love to flow through our lives. He is the only source; such love is available only from Him, so walk close to and with Him.

In v17 John speaks of a brother or sister in need, of a believer knowing the need and is able to meet the need and not doing so. This is important as we need to note that we must know of the need, be able to meet the need, and must love enough to help. We may know of needs, would love to help, but be unable to do so materially or financially and then we are not to feel guilty. Also realise it does not mean we are a soft touch - love must also be wise and tough. Sometimes the easiest thing is to give help on money, but it may not be the best.

Love is wise and discerning and we would be foolish to give money to an alcoholic, or to a drug addict, but we could give them

food or we could give them something to do and give them food, so they realise something of the dignity of working and being benefitted by such. While we want to be loving, we are not to be unwise. We are to realise the NT says if a man or woman **will not work** because they are idle, lazy, they must not eat (2 *Thessalonians 3:7* as in the situation in Thessalonica some were abusing Christian love and sponging off others and doing so for “spiritual” reasons). Yet Christians, even ones that used to steal, are urged to work and to provide for those in need (Ephesians 4:28).

Out of love we are to use our material possessions for our brothers and sisters in need. John goes from plural in v16 to the singular here in v17 and underlines our own personal responsibilities. Yet it is more than just giving money or possessions, yes it certainly can touch our bank accounts, but it will also touch our diaries as we make time for people; it will touch our talents as we use them to help others; our possessions as we hold and use them correctly; it will touch our temperaments as we will find ourselves being challenged and changed and it will challenge our stewardship of all the Lord has given us. No doubt it will challenge us in other areas also.

To love as Jesus does, we will not weigh up whether or not it is worth it. Would God have saved any of us if it was a question of worth!?! Love is without self-interest and so it is self-sacrificing, for the benefit of the recipient - whether they recognise it or even thank us. It is for the minor things of life as well as for the big, spectacular things also. It is being willing, as we live, to show this love to those around us and in our church. Are we ready for that? Are we willing for this active love to be shown both to us and through us?

Yes, we can talk about love and speak of it so well, but if we are without love, then we are as an off-key church bell, or saucepan lids banging together - as we are told in 1 Corinthians 13. Being possessed by and possessing such love is not only right, but gives us blessings also - assurance grows and develops as v19ff tells us. The by-products of such love, more than make up for any cost or sacrifice. I know we are not to love in order to get something back in return, but the principle in Scripture is “*Cast your bread and the water and it will return to you*” (Ecclesiastes 11:1); “*Give, and it will be given to you.*” (Luke 6:38). God is no man’s debtor and we will never lose out by living and loving God’s way.

God’s word challenges us as a church and as individuals. Are you and I ready to take seriously God’s word here in 1 John 3 and actively show the love of Christ to other Christians here, also to be moved by that same love to reach out to a world that needs our Saviour more than they could ever imagine?