



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

1 JOHN 3:15-16 – THE CALL TO LOVE: PART 1

COLORADO

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John stresses the believers' command to love as a test to reveal genuine faith. This is not anything new. John refers to the teachings of Christ Himself. John 13:34-35, says that love should mark the lives of believers and Christ was our example. In John's Gospel, the commandment to love was Christ's commandment to His disciples and all who would follow.

I. 1 JOHN 3:15-16 – THE CALL TO LOVE: PART 1

(14) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (15) Everyone who hates his brother, is a murderer, and you know that a murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (16) We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”
1 John 3:14-16

John brings to light a strong example from the Old Testament to contrast with love; when Cain slew his brother. We cannot underestimate the sinful potential lurking in our heart. (Jeremiah 17:9) John has shown that the absence of love reveals the absence of genuine faith and what family we belong to. There is only two families: the family of God or the family of the devil..

John is emphatic, “We”. “We” who are Christians are different. “We” love one another, “we” stand out, and that gives evidence that “we” are children of God. Just as hatred and jealousy give evidence that one is not a believer, so also does love and self-sacrifice indicate that one has “passed out of death into life”, into God’s family. Against the backdrop of the world’s hatred in the previous verse, John looks to an analysis of Christian love that characterizes the children of God.¹

Our new birth gives us a new life through salvation in Jesus Christ. This salvation changes and transforms our sinful and murderous attitudes into loving ones that demonstrate genuine faith.² (Colossians 2:11) Thus all believers have, “passed out of death into life”. Christ’s atonement on the cross lifts us up to new life in Christ for all who believe in Him.

So the obvious question is what about all those really good people who aren’t Christians. They aren’t consumed with hatred and they love often better than those who call themselves Christians. How can they really be children of the devil? And we must turn to John for that answer. What is it that makes the difference between the two families? How is it that we can pass from death to life? Only through salvation found in Jesus Christ alone. He alone paid for the penalty of our sins. He alone was the sinless substitute for our sins

making atonement for us on the cross. Only by believing in Him are we born again to new life. And John tells us that all those with this new life will be characterized by the love of Jesus Christ when “He laid down His life for us.” (1 John 3:16)

A. LOVE, HATE, ETERNAL LIFE- 1 JOHN 3:15

“Everyone who hates his brother, is a murderer, and you know that a murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” 1 John 3:15

And so John concludes his view, and God’s view, on love and hatred. Here he tells us that God’s view of hatred is like murder. John is very black and white. What he is not saying is that believers could never commit murder or that a murderer could not be saved. But rather that those characterized by hate and not love reveal a heart that is not saved and will perish eternally. This one does not have eternal life “abiding in him.”³

The practice of love is the determinative test for all who claim to be a Christian. The absence of love reveals the inner state of the heart. Love and hate are mutually exclusive and there is no neutral ground. Love and hatred are moral opposites.

Is it possible for a Christian believer truly to be a believer while refusing to love someone who God loves and for whom Christ died? Saving faith brings us into union with Jesus Christ, the God Who is love. Likeness is the evidence of belonging. This is something we must ponder often. For the one who does not love cannot be assured he or she is of the family of God.⁴

Having stressed the importance of love here in this verse, John contrasts the children of God with the children of the devil in the next verse. Children of Satan are not characterized by love.

B. “WE KNOW LOVE BY THIS...” - 1 JOHN 3:16

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” 1 John 3:16

Now, after showing what the presence or absence of love reveals. John points to the supreme revelation of love in the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He defines love by His life and indicates how believers are obligated to practice love as well.

What is the true criteria of love? How can we understand what real love is? There is a lot said about love these days, so what does John mean by love?

John brings us to the supreme example of love found only in Jesus Christ. “We know love”, refers to a knowledge gained by diligent contemplation. We can understand this love for in

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Christ we possess the supreme manifestation of it. John says, “that He laid down His life for us.”

The love John speaks of can’t be understood apart from that historical event; Christ’s sacrifice for us on the cross. It is by the cross that the greatest of all love, agape love, is revealed fully.⁵

“For us” Jesus Christ became our sin bearing sacrifice. “For us” He experienced the God forsakenness of the cross that we might be rescued from hell and reconciled to God. And the love John speaks of can’t be understood apart from this event. It is by the cross that the greatest of all love, agape love, is demonstrated fully.

“laid down” Greek “*etheken*” aorist active verb denoting a deliberate, voluntary act

This verb expresses a love this willing to sacrifice self on behalf of others. Christ was not killed as a martyr, but He willingly as an act of His own will, gave Himself “for us”. He acted in the interest of others and not Himself. Christ gave the greatest possible expression of love for others by His death on the cross. Christ’s love was not mere sentiment or emotion. No His love was expressed by what He did. He “laid down His life for us”.⁶

Therefore, John says, “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” John immediately links Christ’s example of self-sacrificing love to that of the believer.

“we ought”- not just a must, but rather refers to a continuing obligation..

All believers have a continuing obligation to the likeness of Christ, to that same kind of love. And the extent to which a believer’s love should be willing to go is that we would be willing to lay down our life. Loving our brother and sister as Christ loved us could mean that we make the ultimate sacrifice to secure their good. Though this would be rare, we can’t overlook this idea of self-sacrifice too quickly. We may not have to die for others, but we may need to die to our self or sacrifice our own interests for others.⁷

Our world encourages self-satisfaction and not sacrifice. But this is the standard of love that we are obligated to give of ourselves as Christ did. This is what love really is. And this is our continuing obligation to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The call here is this kind of love expressed to our brothers and sisters in Christ specifically...not the world. Where that love is failing, our greatest need is not so much to be exhorted to love, but to be reacquainted with the Savior’s selfless sacrifice for sinners...for us.⁸

Do we love like this? Do we really love our brothers and sisters in Christ, willing to show that love at any cost?

¹ Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: The Epistles of John*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979. Pg. 93-94.

² MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 133.

³ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary Series on 1-3 John*. Moody Press: Chicago, IL, 2007. Pg. 134-135.

⁴ Hamilton, Ian, *Let’s Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 47.

⁵ Hamilton, Ian, *Let’s Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 44.

⁶ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary*. Bob Jones University Press: Greenville, SC, 1991. Pg. 159=160.

⁷ Boice, James Montgomery, *An Expository Commentary: The Epistles of John*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979. Pg. 96.

⁸ Hamilton, Ian, *Let’s Study the Letters of John*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, UK, 2008. Pg. 45.