

Confident Love

Focal Verses • 1 John 3:11–24

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will EXPLORE the many dimensions of loving others according to 1 John 3, EMBRACE God's commandments to love with obedience and expectation, and IDENTIFY ways to grow in our love for others.

In Focus

Monique was excited about the opportunity to engage her church in the largest community holiday event in her city. God had opened the door for the invitation and she got the pastor's approval. Everyone was excited and advertisements had gone out to the community. They would be able to give out food, clothes, and resources to people in need during the holidays. A few weeks before the event, a new church coordinator was hired, and Monique was asked to work with her on final details. Two weeks before the event, the coordinator called and said the event was canceled.

Monique was devastated and angry. She suspected that the coordinator was jealous that the idea was not hers, but to cancel everything was ridiculous! This was to glorify God not to put a bad light on the church. The church was well known for their choirs that sang about love, but Monique was trying to have them practice what they preached. The next day the pastor called to say that everything was on track. Monique was relieved and thanked him.

Have you ever seen a believer or group of believers say that they love others and not show it with their actions? What was the result of that lack of love in action?

Keep in Mind

“And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24, KJV).

KJV

1 John 3:11–24

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

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22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

NLT

1 John 3:11–24

11 This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

12 We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.

13 So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

14 If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers, it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead.

15 Anyone who hates another brother or sister is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.

16 We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

17 If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?

18 Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

19 Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.

20 Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.

21 Dear friends, if we don't feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence.

22 And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him.

23 And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.

24 Those who obey God's commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us.

The People, Places, and Times

Cain. The eldest son of Adam and Eve, Cain became the tiller of the soil while his brother Abel was a keeper of sheep. Both had brought a sacrifice to the Lord (Genesis 4:3–4). Abel acted in faith by bringing a sacrifice more suitable than that of Cain (Hebrews 11:4). Cain's rage burned out of control against God's rejection. In retaliation, he slaughtered his brother, whose gift had been accepted (Genesis 4:5–8). The Lord confronted Cain with his guilt, judged and marked him, sending him out of the land.

Commandments to Love. In the Gospels, Jesus instructed His disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5:43–45) and to love their neighbors as themselves (Luke 10:25–37). He then introduced a “new commandment,” which called for Christians to love one another (John 15:12, 17). This command did not replace the previous two; it aimed to demonstrate to those outside the church the distinctiveness of Christ's teachings. The purpose of loving one another within the church was to provide clear evidence to the world that (1) Jesus' followers embodied Christ-like love for each other, (2) a strong human community could find its foundation in Christ, and (3) Jesus' claims about Himself, supported by the miracles He performed, were true (John 13:35, 17:20–23, 21:24–25).

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Background

In Jesus' time, many believed that obeying the commandments could prove themselves worthy of God's blessings (Galatians 3:2). However, Jesus made it clear that love is a natural result of God's blessings, not a prerequisite for receiving them.

This letter was written to the members of the churches in Asia Minor, serving as a reminder to God's children to love one another. The apostle John aims to show the church how to put God's love into action. The commandment to love illustrates how Christ's disciples should behave. This love has been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Without showing love to others, one is hard pressed to claim to love genuinely.

Why is it important to remember that greater love is a result of relationship with Jesus?

At-A-Glance

1. Living Out Love (1 John 3:11–16)
2. Showing Our Love (vv. 17–20)
3. Confidence in Love (vv. 21–24)

In Depth

1. Living Out Love (1 John 3:11–16)

The true test of discipleship is that we love one another (v. 11). No one can claim to be a child of God and not have love for another child of God. An attitude like that would be like Cain, Adam's oldest son, who murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8-10). Cain's actions were motivated by jealousy and hatred. We must carefully guard our hearts against envy and jealousy against other people. God knows what each of us needs and desires, and we should thank God that His blessings are available to all His children. We have no business being jealous of other Christians. They are our brothers and sisters, too.

The early Christians were persecuted to the point of death simply for their love for Christ. John's audience was no doubt afraid and uncertain of their paths, knowing that the world hated them, families had cast them out, and old communities were no longer welcoming to them. But John admonishes the church to be steadfast in the face of opposition. The apostle affirms that one who has passed from spiritual death to spiritual life is one who loves others. The true test of discipleship is love for one another (v. 11). No one can claim to be a child of God without loving other children of God. An attitude like that resembles Cain who murdered his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8- 10). Cain's actions were driven by jealousy and hatred. We must guard our hearts against envy and jealousy towards others. God knows what each of us needs and desires, and we should thank Him for making His blessings available to all His children.

We should never feel jealous of other Christians; they are our brothers and sisters, too.

2. Showing Our Love (1 John 3:17–20)

Our love for others is evidenced by our willingness to give to others. Genuine Christian love gives to others and expects nothing in return. The apostle exhorts us to display our love by doing. We should not just love "in word, neither in the tongue." This means love should be more than just a matter of speech. It is easy to say we love one another as long as nothing is required of us. That is why John says to love "in deed and truth." In other words, put your love into action.

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Since we know that Jesus' death is the means to our salvation, John says Christians should be willing to sacrifice their time, talents, and treasure for someone else's good, just as Jesus did. That's really putting love into action. Love is more than mere lip service. We cannot really love another without doing something for them. True love is manifested in action.

Verse 20 says, "God is greater than our heart". What does this mean?

3. Confidence in Love (1 John 3:21–24)

If we fail to love, we are left with feelings of guilt that hinder our confidence in the Lord. When our actions are motivated by love, we can approach God boldly and receive what we ask of Him. His is not a magic formula. When we love as He directs and engages in those actions that please Him, we can have confidence that we are in His will. When we obey God's commands, He honors our requests.

Verse 23 states the commandment clearly. It requires that we believe in Jesus's name and acknowledge He is the Son of God, our Savior, and Lord. It requires that we love each other, especially those in the body of Christ. We must also remain in fellowship with God, which means staying connected to Him through meditating on the Word and praying. But the commandment to live also means that we must stay connected with other Christians. When we obey God's commandments and live in intimate fellowship with Jesus, others will witness a change and ask what fuels our joy. There is no greater witness to the saved and unsaved than expressing the love of God! Our confidence and love are anchored in the fact that we know Christ lives in us, and we live for Him.

What is the proof that Christ abides in us?

Search the Scriptures

1. What proves that we have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14)?
2. How did God show His love for humanity, and how are we to display love (vv. 16-18)?
3. What is the most basic commandment to which we should adhere (v. 23)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Based on John's writings, a Christian is one who loves. Does that mean we are to love everyone, including those who desire to hurt us? Explain.
2. Given the diversity in our world today, how can you love someone who looks and thinks differently than you or someone who has hurt you?
3. Why do loving God and loving others go hand-in-hand? Can they be separated?

Liberating Lesson

Tragedy dominates media attention. The more horrific the crime, the more news coverage it receives. With this kind of media frenzy, wickedness has taken an exalted position in our society, leaving many questioning the true value of love. It is no wonder so many feel love is trivial and irrelevant. Yet, this lesson reminds us that we are commanded to love one another no matter what happens in the world. Consider what the church can do to promote love and unity in a world that seems to be torn by strife, hatred, and confusion.

Are there answers to these problems, and if so, should the church or the government lead the way to solve them?

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Application for Activation

Love is a basic human desire and the evidence that we belong to the body of Christ. Love is more than a word. It is a repeated commandment from the Lord: love one another. Christian love for others is shown by what we do for others. List things believers can do to show love for other church members, family members, and people we don't even know the Lord. Choose one item and commit to fulfilling this act of love this week.

More Light on the Text

1 John 3:11–24, KJV

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

John's message is clear: Love for one another is integral to the Gospel message. It is a command that Jesus gave to the disciples during the Upper Room discourse (John 13–14). It is also the command that He declared was the second greatest commandment outside of loving God Himself. From the outset, love was a vital part of Jesus' teachings. If love for one another is absent in a community, then they are not following the way of Jesus.

In this verse, John states that love should not be an afterthought. Obedience to Jesus' command to love one another as He loves us is expected of anyone who accepts the Gospel message. Love shows us that the Gospel includes both the benefits of salvation and the responsibility of Christians to love one another. Salvation and love go hand in hand. They are not separate or secondary to the Christian faith. The message of the Christian faith is love, obedience to the command, and imitation of the life of Jesus Christ.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

Cain is cited here as an example of one who did not show love for his brother. Cain is characterized as belonging to "that wicked one." The word "wicked" (Gk. *poneros*, poh-nay-ROHS) is also translated as "hurtful" or "evil" and refers to someone who would cause harm. John is explicitly saying that Cain belonged to Satan. Saying Cain belonged to Satan is John's way of pointing out that the way we treat each other is part of the larger cosmic battle between good and evil. If we are characterized by love, it will affect our behavior. Likewise, if we are characterized by hatred, it will certainly show in our behavior.

Cain slew his brother Abel because Cain's "works were evil." Notice that the same Greek word, *poneros* (poh-nay-ROHS), translated earlier in the verse as "wicked one," is now also used to describe the quality of Cain's works. Cain's murderous act was most assuredly not motivated by love but by hatred. From the example of Cain, we see that hatred facilitates envy, violence, and murder. While we may not literally murder people, we may assassinate their character and reputation because of hatred (cf. Matthew 5:21–22).

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. 14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hated his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

"The world" here is representative of all those opposed to God. John is saying that we, as Christians, should not be surprised because the world hates us. It is the expectation for Christians to love one another in obedience to Christ's command. But those who have not experienced the love of Christ are characterized by their lack of love. They are still dead in their sin. Such acts of love, then, translate into acts of righteousness.

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Obedying Christ's command to love one another gives Christians inner knowledge and assurance of their passage from spiritual death to spiritual life. John compares brotherly love to a rite of passage. It represents a significant change or progress in one's spiritual life. It is crucial to note that John does not say our salvation is achieved by loving others. That would be salvation by works. Rather, his point is that having a love for others is evidence of one's maturity and the passage from the death of sin to a life based on faith in Christ. Love is the evidence of, and not the means of, salvation. The absence of love for others shows that they have not allowed the Holy Spirit, who enables us to produce the fruit of love, to act upon their hearts.

This is an echo of Cain's experience from verse 12. John presents the serious consequence of hatred and establishes the parallel between hate and murder. Anyone who, like Cain, hates his brother is also a murderer. Having established this link with Cain, John now concludes that hatred of others is the spiritual equivalent of murder and that no murderer is entitled to eternal life.

The word for "abiding" is from the Greek word *meno* (MEH-noh), which means "to remain," "last," or "endure." As John states, those who hate their brothers (and sisters) are murderers and do not have eternal life abiding in them. They are not "heaven-bound." Therefore, hatred is the equivalent of spiritual death.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Quite the opposite of those who do not love God and who would kill their brothers with hatred are those who do follow God and are willing to die for their brothers. The Greek word *ginosko* (ghee-NOOS-koh), translated here as "perceive," refers to obtaining knowledge. John is saying that we will obtain knowledge of the love of God by looking at the life of Jesus. Very practically, God demonstrated His love to us by sending His Son to lay down His life on our behalf. This demonstration of divine love is the heart of the Gospel. Christ gave His own sinless life to pay the penalty incurred by our sins. He now offers the pardon resulting from this sacrificial act of love to all who will accept it by faith in Him.

Divine love is giving love. God gave His Son for love. The Son gave His life for love. The Greek word *agape* (ah-GAH-pay), translated here as "love," finds its ultimate definition in Jesus' unconditional act of giving. If Christians follow this model of divine love, they should also give something of themselves to express their love for others. Jesus says there is no greater love than this self-sacrificing love (John 15:13). Christians are called to a self-sacrificing love rather than a self-preserving love. As beneficiaries of this kind of love, we must love others in the same way.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how wellethe the love of God in him?

John says that when any Christian has the material means to help the needy but refuses to give compassionately, the existence of Christlike love in them is open to question. Using a rhetorical question, John shows that God's love does not exist in anyone who can refuse to help those in need. The issue is not whether God loves the person but whether such a person possesses God's kind of love toward others.

Our material possessions are not given to us only for self-indulgence. God's command to love others requires that we use our possessions to obey that command. Some regard worldly possessions as an end in themselves. But John says they are a means for expressing God's love, opening the door of compassion in us, and enabling us to reach out to others in need.

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The Greek word *splagchnon* (SPLANGKH-non) means “bowels” or “intestines,” but can also be understood figuratively as “tender mercy” or “inward affection.” It indicates that compassion is a quality of one’s inner emotions. We use similar metaphors when we talk about feeling something deep down, in our “gut,” or with our heart. As such, love must be present inside before it can show outwardly. Anybody can perceive a need, but not everybody has the compassion to help others.

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Addressing his readers as children suggests that John is advanced in years and shows the family atmosphere he is trying to create among God’s people. There is no better institution that reflects the kind of sacrificial love John is writing about than the family. Believers should be aware that blood ties are temporary and end with the death of a relative. Spiritual ties, on the other hand, are eternal and have no end. Including himself in the warning, he says, “let us not love in word, neither in tongue.” The construction suggests that, like a father giving advice, John asked them to stop merely talking about love and show it through deeds and truth. Christian love is more than a feeling—it involves the essential ingredient of giving. When people often say they love another, their only real action is from their mouth (saying words). But true love engages in actions centered on others.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

The word “hereby” (Gk. *en touto*, enn TOO-toe, here meaning “by this”) refers to verse 18 and points to an active expression of love that corresponds to Christ’s self-sacrifice. When Christians demonstrate this kind of active love, they know they belong to the “truth” (Gk. *aletheia*, ah-LAY-thay-ah). This can be defined as “what is true in things pertaining to God and the duties of man, morality, and religious truth.” In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the sheep on Christ’s right were commended for their acts of love toward others and were rewarded accordingly by Christ (Matthew 25:31–46). In the future, when Christ returns, we will all stand before Him to be judged and rewarded according to our deeds.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

The Greek word *kardia* (kar-DEE-ah) refers to the heart organ, but figuratively denotes the center of all physical and spiritual life. Therefore, if the testimony of our heart is negative, then we have not been sacrificially reaching out to love others like Christ. The Greek word for “condemn” is *kataginosko* (kah-tah-ghee-NOHS-koh), which is a compound word from *kata*- “against” and *ginosko* “to know” (as in v. 16). Our heart knows all that can be held against us. Fortunately, God is greater than our hearts and knows our motives for service. Just as we cannot deceive ourselves, we cannot deceive God. He knows (Gk. *ginosko*) all things, not just that which would condemn us.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. 22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

As Christians, we must learn to consider our inner thoughts. The Greek word for “confidence” is *parresia* (par-ray-SEE-ah), which means “openness,” or “speaking or acting without concealment.” It may be easy to deceive others, but God knows our hearts. Therefore, John says, if our hearts are open and honest, we can go confidently before the throne of grace and petition God. Verse 22 discusses the benefits of a positive testimony of the heart. If we have a confident heart because we keep God’s commandments and do the things that please Him, then we also have the assurance that we shall receive whatever we pray for that is in line with His will. John’s point is that disobeying Christ’s command to love can hinder our prayers, so we should obey Him. When Christians act in obedient, self-sacrificing love, we gain confidence in God.

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23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

In this verse, John provides the crux of his epistle. Faith in Christ and love for one another bring us into a new relationship with God where we become His children. Believing in the name of Jesus Christ includes accepting that He is the Son of God who gave His life to pay the penalty for our sins, reconciling us to God.

The second part of the commandment is to love one another. The sequence is important. The command is that we both have faith in Christ and also love one another. Faith in Jesus Christ is the basis of our new relationship with God, and love for one another expresses that saving faith.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

To keep God's commands, which include loving one another, is to abide in Him and to have Him abide in us. As referenced in verse 15, the word "abideth" (Gk. *meno*, MEH-noh) means continually being present. This mutual indwelling characterizes the relationship between God and His Son Jesus. It points to their unity (John 17:21). The believers' mutual indwelling with God also refers to the familial union between God and His believing children. God is present in believers through His Holy Spirit, who dwells in them (cf. Romans 8:9, 11). Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, Christians have a sense of belonging to God's family. By the Spirit, we know we are children of God (v. 16). Since God is love, His children should also be characterized by love.

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Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

1 Thessalonians 4–5
Proverbs 22

TUESDAY

2 Thessalonians 1–3
Proverbs 23

WEDNESDAY

1 Timothy 1–6
Proverbs 24

THURSDAY

2 Timothy 1–4
Proverbs 25

FRIDAY

Titus 1–3
Proverbs 26

SATURDAY

Philemon 1:1–25
Proverbs 27

SUNDAY

Hebrews 3–4
Proverbs 28