

Introduction

Jesus's Love

In John 13, the night of Jesus's arrest, Jesus tied a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin, and began to wash His disciples' feet. Peter reasonably protested. How could Jesus, the eternal God, act as a servant to His disciples? They should be washing His feet.

There are two very interesting things about this event. First, Jesus acknowledged that He was indeed their Lord (John 13:13). Yet, He still considered it right that their Lord would act as their servant (John 13:14-16). Second, Jesus washed Judas's feet, knowing that Judas would soon betray Him (John 13:11). Right after Jesus taught the significance of washing their feet, Judas left to betray Jesus (John 13:30).

Imagine for a moment John's thoughts as he wrote John 13. In a Gospel devoted to showing Jesus's deity (John 20:31), John recounted Jesus's love and humility the night of His arrest. In fact, he begins in John 13:1 "... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." In that same context, John recounted Judas's betrayal - Judas, his friend and fellow-disciple. *How could Judas betray Jesus in response to this act of love and humility? How could hate Jesus so deeply, even as Jesus loved Him?*

As soon as Judas left (John 13:31), Jesus told His disciples that the defining characteristic of His disciples was love for each other. John 13:35 "35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Church Unity

How important is love within a church? Jesus frequently taught that we should love our neighbors (Luke 10:25-37), even our enemies (Matt 5:44). Yet, He said the church's reputation would come from love **within the church**.

Frances Shaeffer wrote, "Unity in the church is not uniformity. It is a visible demonstration of the gospel, in which love overcomes our differences."

Main Idea

1 John was written to a church who had experienced a significant division, leading to many within the church leaving (1 John 2:19). One of the major points of this letter is that those who had left the church proved by their separation, false teaching, and unholy living that their professions of faith were false. They did not know God.

1 John 3:11-18 describes a characteristic of genuine followers of Jesus. ***Those who know God love other believers as Christ loves us.*** This passage does not focus on our love for our neighbor or our enemy; instead, it focuses on our love for each other. **Division has no place in Christ's church (1 Cor 1:10-13).**

We must be careful when reading this passage that we read it as a **mirror** rather than a **window**. We should not read this passage about division and unity, looking at others who may legitimately be sources of division. Let the Spirit convict them. Rather, we should read this passage with **self-examination**. *Do I love other believers as Christ loves me?*

This passage makes two points about our love for other believers. Both of these points show that our love for others reveals our view of God.

Cain's Hatred

First, **People hate Christians because they hate God.** 1 John 3:11–15 “11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should **love one another**. 12 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 brother’s righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that **the world hates you**. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love **abides in death**. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

A message to the church

Who does verse 11 command to love one another? This is a message **to the church, not to unbelievers**. Verse 11 says “we should love one another.” Remember the context of this command. 1 John 2:28-3:10 describes those who are children of God versus those who are children of Satan. Verses 4-7 describes children of God as those who continue in righteousness; that is, God’s people continually repent of sin. Verses 8-10 describe children of Satan as those who continue in sin. So, verse 11 says to **believers**, “**we** should love one another.”

Cain and Abel

Verse 12 illustrates the **opposite of this command** (hatred toward another believer and division in the church) with the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. Both men brought offerings to God that were similar to the offerings later described in the Law (Gen 4:3-4). God accepted Abel and his offering, but rejected Cain and his offering (Gen 4:4-5). In his anger, Cain killed his brother, Abel (Gen 4:8).

Why did Cain kill his own brother? 1 John 2:12 gives two reasons. *First*, Cain “was **of the evil one**.” That is, Cain was a follower of Satan, not God. By the way, there is not a third option. As we see in the temptation of Eve in the Garden, a person either follows God or they follow Satan in rejecting God. Jesus described Satan as “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). Cain murdered Abel because he “was of the evil one.”

Second, Cain murdered Abel because “his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.” We have to read this in its context. 1 John 2:29 “[Since] you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.” Cain hated Abel because Abel showed evidence that he was a child of God. **Cain**

did not hate Abel; he hated God. Like Adam and Eve, Cain chose to follow Satan rather than God.

The world

How does the story of Cain and Abel relate to the church? Because those who hate God hate believers, verse 13 says that churches should not be surprised if **the world hates them**. Listen to the progression of how the Gospel of John describes the world's hatred. John 3:20 "20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light ..." Jesus said in John 7:7 "The world ... hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." He said to His disciples in John 15:18 "18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." John 15:23 "23 Whoever hates me hates my Father also." John 17:14 "14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." Hatred toward **Jesus** cannot be separated from hatred toward God. Hatred toward **Christians** cannot be separated from hatred toward God. **People hate Christians because they hate God.**

As I mentioned earlier, we should read this passage as a **mirror**, not a **window**. Remember, this passage is primarily about those **within the church loving one another** (1 John 3:11) and is written in the context of false teachers that have arisen **from within the church**, causing division (1 John 2:19; 4:1). This verse about Cain and Abel (two brothers) is an illustration of division that arises **within a church**. 1 John 2:19 says that these false Christians went out from the church and 1 John 4:1 says they went out into the world. So, while verse 13 refers to **unbelievers who are outside** of the church, it *also* refers to **unbelievers within** the church.

At worst, these verses show that division in a church happens primarily because there are church members who **falsely profess faith** in Jesus, but do not have the Holy Spirit. That is quite true. At best, division comes from those who have faith, but do not walk in the Spirit. **Unity in a church comes from knowing God and walking in the Spirit.**

Death to life

What then are the implications of division within a church? Verses 14-15 make it clear that Scripture is saying here that **anyone who does not love other Christians does not know God**. This applies to those **outside of the church** who explicitly reject Christ. But it also applies to those **within the church** who constantly sow division. Our love for others gives evidence whether or not we have eternal life (know God).

Jesus described salvation similar to verse 14 and taught that passing from death to life was a result of **faith in Him**. John 5:21-24 "21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the **Son gives life** to whom he will. 22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has **passed from death to life.**"

So, when 1 John 3:14-15 says that “Whoever does not love abides in death” and does not have “eternal life abiding in him,” the point is that **if you do not love other Christians, you do not have eternal life.** Now, this is not a condition of eternal life. The **only condition** of eternal life is genuine **faith** in Jesus. But this is evidence of genuine or false professions of faith. No one who has faith in Jesus, who is made eternally alive, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, who knows God . . . can continue unrepentantly hating other believers. John 13:35 “35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.””

Why does verse 15 say that murderers do not have eternal life? Think about the biblical context of that statement. **Moses** murdered an Egyptian. **David** had Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, murdered. **Paul** gave approval to Stephen’s murder and, by his own admission, sought to **destroy** the church.

Does 1 John 3:15 teach that murderers, like these men, cannot have eternal life? Is murder an unforgivable sin? Jesus’s teaching helps us understand this verse correctly. Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-22 “21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is **angry** with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” Jesus equated **hatred** toward your brother with **murder**. This is the same point in 1 John 3:15. **Cain’s sin did not begin with murder; it began with hatred toward Abel.** Those who continue in hatred toward a brother does not know God.

Summary

1 John 3:11 reminds us that Jesus commanded His followers to love one another. Verses 12-15 teaches that those who hate believers, whether within or outside the church, are like Cain, they don’t know God. And ultimately, these verses teach that **People hate Christians because they hate God.** Our view of God is reflected in our view and treatment of other believers.

God’s love

In contrast, **Christians love one another because God’s love abides in them.** 1 John 3:16-18 “16 By this we know love, that **he laid down his life** for us, and we ought to lay down our lives **for the brothers.** 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? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in **deed and in truth.**”

Jesus’s love

How do Christians come to love one another? Love within a church is **not natural**. We come from different backgrounds. We have different preferences. We have different interests. Love within the church is **supernatural**. It is a work of God.

We know love because of Christ. 1 John 3:16 “16 By **this** we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” **There is no**

greater display of love that Jesus's death. God did not *owe* us atonement. God owed us nothing. We rebelled against Him and rejected Him.

So, why did Jesus die for us? Jesus did not die for us because of anything within us. Jesus died for us because **He is God and God is loving.** God's nature is the driving force behind Jesus's death. John 3:16 "16 "For God so **loved** the world, that he **gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Romans 5:8 "8 but God shows his **love** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ **died** for us."

God's love is the basis for the gospel. As 1 John 3:14 says, those who don't know God are **dead**. Our sin separates us from God, who gives us life. We are spiritually and eternally dead; we are just waiting for our bodies to catch up. But because God is loving, Jesus became a man so that He could bear the guilt of our sins and die in our place. Those who have faith in Jesus are made **eternally alive**. So that even though we may die now, we will be resurrected to eternal life. We do **nothing** to earn this eternal life. Salvation is purely by faith and genuine faith is a complete surrender and dependence upon Jesus. Genuine faith acknowledges that I can do nothing; therefore, I can **only** rely on Jesus.

A brother in need

It is important to read verse 17 in its context. Verse 17 describes helping a fellow-believer (brother) in need as the test of genuine love and genuine faith. Listen to Jesus's teaching on this in John 15:12–14 "12 "This is my commandment, that you **love one another as I have loved you**. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone **lay down his life** for his friends. 14 You are my friends ..." Jesus **described loving one another as laying down your life** and pointed to **His own self-sacrifice as the ultimate example** of that love. Similarly, 1 John 3:16 describes Jesus laying down His life and 1 John 3:17 gives us an example of providing for the needs of other Christians.

How do these two points, laying down your life and providing for needs, relate to one another? Loving other Christians is portrayed as laying down your life for one another (John 15:12-13). But laying down your life refers to **more than dying**. We do not lay down our lives for one another one time as a final act of self-sacrifice. 1 John 3:16 is not saying that we should seek opportunities to die for another believer. We lay down our lives for one another by **daily acts of self-sacrifice**.

What if we do not provide for fellow-believers in need? Notice the two conclusions verse 17 makes. If I see my brother in need and I do not provide for him, I am **closing my heart** against him and **God's love does not abide in me**. That is a bold, yet biblical conclusion. My love for other believers **reflects my love for God**. 1 John 4:20 "20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen **cannot love God** whom he has not seen." **One way we show our love for God is by our love for other believers.**

In fact, we can take this a step further. **The only reason we are able to love each other is because God's love abides in us.** Remember verses 12-13 make the point that those who do not know God do not love Christians. My love for you is a **gift of God and a**

work of the Holy Spirit. Gal 5:19-21 says that the flesh (our natural desires) produce “enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy,” among other things. But for those who know God, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal 5:22-23). **Christians love one another because God’s love abides in them.**

Deed and truth

How do you know if you love other believers? If we are honest, love can be **faked**. We can show love while our hearts are full of envy or animosity. Nonetheless, verse 18 makes the point that true love is displayed by our **actions**, not merely our words. This does not mean that words are not important. Paul *said* to the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians 7:3 “... you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.” Words are important, but words without action are empty. Notice that verse 18 equates loving in deed (action) with truth. That is, **true love will be displayed by action.**

Conclusion

One of the conclusions of the modern-day **deconstruction** movement is that it is possible to **love Jesus without loving the church**. Such an idea is completely foreign to Scripture. **John Stott** wrote, “The church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. The church is not an afterthought; it is the family of God for which Christ died” (*The Message of Ephesians*).

How should we respond to this passage? First, **we must have faith in Jesus**. No one can say, ‘I love you, but I don’t like your family.’ My family is so much a part of who I am that if you hate them, you do not love me. In a much greater way, those who reject Jesus, reject God; He is God. **Love for others begins with love for God through faith in Jesus.**

Second, **we must show our faith by our love**. If I harbor anger, bitterness, or envy in my heart toward another believer ... I am not living by faith. If I am apathetic toward other believers ... I am not living by faith. **Faith without love is empty** (1 Cor 13).

How you view and treat other believers reveals your view of God. This passage makes two points. First, **people hate Christians because they hate God**. Like Cain, anyone who cannot love believers does not know God. In contrast, **Christians love one another because God’s love abides in us**. Your love for other Christians is not a natural event; it is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in you. 1 John 3:11-18 teaches that **those who know God love other believers as Christ loved us.**