

Mercy Hill Church

1 John • The Love of Jesus • 1 John 3:11-24 • No Date

Main Point

Love is defined for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Only an inauthentic faith is characterized by hatred.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is love? What is love not?

Do you think that we, even as Christians, sometimes confuse what love is and love isn't? Why or why not?

Why do you think love is such a defining mark of the true disciple of Jesus? What does the presence or absence of love communicate about our faith?

Love is perhaps the most defining characteristic of the true disciple of Jesus. When we love, as God defines love, we show that we have truly experienced the love of God in Christ. Conversely, hate is a mark of inauthenticity. John acknowledged the existence of hatred, but also claimed that the expression of true love is evidence of an authentic salvation in Christ.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 3:11-15.

Refer back to Genesis 4:1-16. How did Cain and Abel prepare their offerings for the Lord? What was the content of their offerings?

Why was Cain's offering rejected by God? Why was Abel's offering pleasing to God? Read Hebrews 11:4 for additional insight.

What does Cain's response to God reveal about his attitude (v. 5)?

Cain and Abel recognized the need to worship God, and each brought an offering to Him. Each man gave according to his own profession. God approved of Abel's worship. In contrast, the Lord did not give approval to Cain or to his offering. According to John, Cain hated Abel because Abel was righteous and he was evil.

Why does righteousness incite hatred? What does the righteousness of one reveal about the wickedness of another?

In what sense are we all murderers when we hate our brothers?

Abel's righteousness not only pleased God; it exposed the sin in Cain, and Cain reacted violently. John reminds us that the same thing still happens today. As Christians practice righteousness, the sin of the world will be exposed. Once that evil is exposed, the person can either act on the evil and become a murderer in his heart if not in deed, or he can turn to the love of God in Christ for forgiveness.

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 3:16-18.

What, according to these verses, are the components of true love?

Why is true love sacrificial in nature? What kinds of things does love require us to sacrifice?

Why is true love always demonstrated and not just verbalized? If we only verbalize love, what does that mean about the manner in which we love?

Because love is defined by Jesus, we know that true love is both sacrificial and substantive; it is costly and demonstrated. When we love another, we are willing to sacrifice our comfort, desires, and preferences for their sake. And because we are, this kind of love is more than just an expression; it is a solid demonstration of an inner condition.

Can you think of some other examples in Scripture that point out the nature of true love?

How does this understanding of love run contrary to what the world thinks of as love?

| Have a volunteer read 1 John 3:19-24.

What does our demonstration of love do to our consciences according to these verses? Why might love assure our consciences?

Do you ever have moments when you wonder if you truly belong to God? How do you deal with those thoughts when they come up?

Does verse 22 mean we can get God to do whatever we want? If not, what does it mean?

Do you think we try and complicate the Christian life more than John does in verse 23? Why do you think we do that?

From time to time, all of us wonder about our own authenticity. As we look deeply into our hearts, it is disturbing to see the mixed motives and propensity for sin we find there. But thankfully, we are not kept in faith by our own ability, but by God who is greater than any guilty conscience. When we doubt, we remind ourselves that we have received the love of God once and for all through Jesus. It's then that this love not only assures us, but makes us obedient. When we obediently desire what God desires, we can ask for whatever we want in His name.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does this text help you see the true nature of love? How does this passage encourage you when you see the hatred of the world?

Who in your life is most challenging to love like this right now? What are some tangible ways you can practice this kind of love?

Are you being condemned by your conscience this week? How can you remind yourself that God is greater than your conscience?

Pray

Thank God that He is greater than anyone's conscience. Pray that you would trust in Him and His love and not in yourself. Ask Him for the vision to continue to see His great love in Christ so that you might tangibly and sacrificially demonstrate that love to others.

Commentary

| 1 John 3:11-24

Before learning what love is, we read what love is not. We should not be like Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel, because Cain's actions were evil, while Abel's were righteous. Abel's righteousness apparently engendered profound resentment—anger great enough to prompt murder. Just as Cain resented Abel's righteousness, so the world will resent our righteousness. As a result, just as Cain hated Abel, so the world will despise Christians.

True Christians, those born of God, have love for their brothers placed in their hearts by the Lord, so that we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Loving our brothers does not give us eternal life. If we have eternal life, we will manifest it by loving our brothers. Next in the succession of challenging declarations is that anyone who does not love remains in death; if anyone hates his brother, he is a murderer; and no murderer has eternal life in him. This verse treats hate and murder the same as “sin” in verses 6 and 9. A Christian might hate or murder someone, but if this happened, he or she would be overcome with remorse. If a person is willing to harbor habitual hate, or have no remorse at murder, that person is not a Christian.

In stark contrast to this unspeakable hatred is Jesus’ remarkable love. We can understand what love is by looking at Jesus’ example. He laid down his life for us. We ought to be prepared to do the same for one another. While the necessity of laying down our lives for one another is rare, the necessity of helping meet one another’s needs is not. The true test of a Christian’s love is not his words (loving with words or tongue) but his willingness to sacrifice for the sake of his brother ... to love with actions and in truth.

In our desire to live lives of high moral character and good deeds toward others, we will fail. When this happens, our hearts may condemn us. But we can rest in his presence, for God knows everything. He knows that we believe in Christ, that we strive to love our brothers, and that we regret falling short. God does not look only at the outer facts of imperfect love, but at the inner fact of having been born of God. The human heart is not the final standard. Rather, God is! God’s power keeps us secure in him. We may silence our condemning hearts in two ways: (1) by confessing our sin (1:8) so that we are forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteousness, and (2) by resting in the fact that God knows all things, looking not just at our deeds but at our hearts. Once our hearts no longer condemn us, we can have confidence before God.

As Christians, we must believe in Jesus and love one another. These two ideas stem from the same attitude of the heart, and John sees them as one command. To do one is to do the other. Those who obey God’s commands live in him, or abide in him. Similarly, John 15 links abiding with obeying (15:9–10).