

1 JOHN 3:16-24

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW LOVE

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John continues to paint a pretty clear picture of what loving God looks like. Unfortunately, it might not look all that much like we have decided it should look in North America. North American Christianity seems to be about believing what we want to believe while we want to reject what we don't like about Jesus. As we move into the Easter season this week we will be thinking about that more. Ultimately, Jesus was crucified because of God's plan. However, from a human side, He was murdered because no one wanted Him to be the Sovereign Lord.

That is pretty much the issue that John is addressing with his readers and somehow with those who had walked away from the "fellowship of believers". (1 John 2:19) John makes it crystal clear that while Christianity is a personal decision, it is not an individual pursuit. God calls us into relationship with Himself and with others. In America we want our "faith" to be all about us. It never can be. We are born into His family to be about His business. For many of us, loving Jesus is OK, but loving people demands too much of us: too much time, too much energy, too much money, too much dying to ourselves. However, John is pretty clear isn't he? We really can't have one without the other.

"Jesus didn't die to save solitary individuals to live solitary lives thinking primarily about their solitary freedoms. He saved us to be a community of faith that loves one another in such a way that it shows the Father's love and the Son's love for the world." Jeff Vanderstelt

In 1 John 3:16 John describes what God's love looks like. He laid down his life. The application is that we should lay down ours. Do we really believe that Jesus is calling to lay down our lives or give them up for the sake of others? John summarizes the section by saying that believing in Jesus and loving others is what it looks like to keep his commandments. (1 John 3:23)

Whoever does that abides in God and God abides in Him. I want to somehow fudge on that. I want there to be a way around that, but there doesn't seem to be any.

Please note, that while it is always our choice to decide if we want to live like that, our will doesn't accomplish that much. It is the Holy Spirit working inside us that brings all that to pass and really tells us the truth about the reality of our lives and loves.

I've been thinking through this a lot lately with some others. I would encourage you to do the same. Think it through and pray it through.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Do you think that John really means what he says in this section about laying down our lives, or does that sound “too radical”?
2. How does what John says compare with what Jesus said? (Check out the gospels.)
3. How does what John says compare to what Paul said? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Philippians 2:1-11, etc.)
4. What would life look like if we took this literally and seriously?
5. What impact would it have on the world around us if we took this literally and seriously?
6. So what?