

"CHRISTIAN LOVE" - 1 John 3:14-17

by Pastor Tim Dodson on March 22nd, 2015
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1 John 3:14-19 (14) *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. (15) Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (16) By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (17) But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (18) My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (19) And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.*



1Thessalians 5:22 "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*"

As I look back and reflect on the numerous studies we have thus far explored in this letter, it cannot help but strike me as to the very current feel to what John has been saying. We are living in a day where the prevailing church culture has subtly but steadily diluted the premise of what it looks like to be a Christian. With the quite aggressive and often hostile prejudice and intolerance toward Christians from the world culture on one side and the angry attack position that many church goers take toward other believers on the other side, the individual who seeks to love and learn, and stand and serve according to scripture is finding himself increasingly 'squeezed.'

While *all* the enemies of the faithful can point their finger of accusation at any one of *us*...because we are not theologians or prophets, and claim we in fact have no spiritual clout or even credibility in the humble skin in which we reside, our writer however is not so limited! This is the 'apostle of love.' The "disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 20:2). This was a guy who actually *walked* with Christ...*ministered* with Him...heard Him speak and watched Him live. He has all the right stuff to rise like cream to the top of "the final word." How could anyone who claims the faith even attempt to wrestle with what John has to say? Who can compare? Who can wear that mantle?

So as we weave our way through this letter we are indeed forced to set up and take notice! Truly we have been 'served' by this guy, and to try to wiggle out of what he is teaching can only be seen as the "walk of shame." He is indeed 'cutting to the bone', but the fact remains that this is John and there is no credible way out of what he is saying to us! Yet the reality is that John would have been "unfriended" by a lot of church-going folks a long time ago if they had had the opportunity!

Throughout this letter John has painted pictures of the true Christian and the psuedo-Christian and he does it with a range from the subtle to the overt. And it appears that such is not done to serve as a license for us to be spiritual police towards those around us, but rather primarily so we might truly evaluate our own standing by a faith litmus given by Christ, not by the adulterated greater church of 21st century.

John begins herein saying “*We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren...He who does not love his brother abides in death.*” We can **know** that we are truly redeemed Christians...faithful children of God in good standing, by the tangible evidence of love expressed towards our God **and** those who are fellow believers. Certainly Jesus had much to say about our love expressed toward those *outside* the family, but John is just herein going for this narrow manifested criteria.... “*love the brethren.*” **He says that if we do not, we are not Christians.** Not that we lost it when we spewed hatred through a verbal gush or gossip, or that venting tirade on social media, but that we literally *never had it*, ...that we prove the latter half of verse 14 in that we *still abide in death*.

Our immediate knee-jerk here can and often is one of hostile indignity: “*How dare you take such a position of judgment against me!*” And yet again I remind you that **I** am not saying this...JFB is not saying this...(at least firstly and uniquely)...but this is JOHN...the apostle of Jesus...a ‘son of thunder’...a member of the ‘inner circle’ of Jesus...the “special forces’ of the apostle division of the spiritual marines. We cannot avoid the spiritual implications! It is black and white! Christian doctrine 101! Just take a moment and let this roll over you. Because few passages in scripture have such blistering ramifications, and can so clearly and overtly separate the sheep from the goats.

John has already covered that the righteous *do* righteousness, and the holy *do* holiness. He already barricaded the door of escape on this and nailed it shut. No one of us can claim “*well...I don't hate that person...I just have issues with them*”...or “*I don't hate him, I just don't like him*”. We also can't successfully take the juvenile position... “*well, you don't know what they did to me! They started it! They deserve it!*” Every hole of escape...every leak of excuse has been plugged. If you are indeed a real Christian today, you love the brothers and sisters in Christ. If you do not...in verb action, not just in theory or philosophy, you are not born again and are still lost in your sins.

How can John take such a stance? Because he understands the crucial doctrinal teaching that when we become ‘reborn’, the spirit of God comes to live in us and exercises a vast degree of control over our actions and being. And if “God is love” and “God is in us” then love is in us and that love will flow forth from us. We cannot operate in both worlds and exercise both a spiritual and worldly dynamic. James too makes prohibition of the same idea...that blessing and cursing should come out of the same mouth.

And we must be VERY careful to not hide behind the smoke and mirrors of separating what we *do* from what we *are*! In verse 18 John moves like a hockey goalie to block the shot of attempted escape saying “*let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*” John is clearly calling for us to “**show the money.**” To “**speak the truth in love.**” This counter exists no doubt because we are so quick to say we love people but slow to actually show it. We hold tight the mantra that we love like Jesus and love the church, but fail to actual live that out.

What does this love actually look like? “Christ love” gives time to the other. It gives physical form and action to our words. It sacrifices for others. It is imminently interactive and personal. If you knew someone who was blind and they were walking toward the edge of a cliff, it would be hateful for you to not warn them. If you saw a child playing with a kitchen knife and did nothing to try to stop them, you would be understood as being calloused, uncaring, and flippant. Thus it is not hateful to warn them of an impending judgment that is coming, on the contrary, it is the most loving thing you can ever do...even if it comes at the expense of their hating you as John has already said.

I know plenty of people who tell me they will pray for me, but are unwilling to spend time in fellowship with me and physically move to help carry the load that they are praying to be removed from me. There are plenty of folks who claim to be a brother...even that they love me (I have plenty of letters saying that in my office) but when the chips are down they will throw me under the bus without remorse or even a second thought when something has rubbed them the wrong way.

Again, John is not giving an "easy Jesus" sermon here. He executes a leveling right cross punch saying "*the guy who hates his brother is a murderer.*" Woa. That's some serious language! The question arises herein that if this is so clearly stated, why does it fail to have the obvious impact upon all of us? There can only be one real explanation, and that is we are quick to claim that we *don't actually hate them*. John and his letter then falls prey to our current practice of redefining words and terminology. **So, what does this hate really look like then?**

Psalms 7:11 says that "God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" but the Hebrew doesn't actually call it "hate." The Hebrew word "za'am" means "to denounce, express indignation," or "to be indignant" and it is directed toward the wicked because of their active sin. For those who have repented and put their trust in God, His anger against them and their sin was satisfied by Jesus Christ at the cross. As parents, I am sure you have hated it when a son or daughter disobeyed you but you never hated *them*...and in your love you disciplined them. If you didn't love them, you would simply do nothing...that would be apathy. But the reason it all went down that way is *because he or she is your child*. Hopefully you didn't call them names and 'unfriend' them on social media!

We could go to a dictionary at this point and seek the precise definition of "hate." Yet would any of us fail to know hate if we were face to face with it? I could google the word "bear" and look at pictures and read the descriptions of such, and I might still be able to say that I know little about actual bears. But I promise you that if I come face to face with one, I will know it's a bear! That's where we are with hate. The problem resides in whose eyes we are seeing through. The one who hates another and would openly debate the premise of hate, or the one on the receiving end of such?

The one on the receiving end of such seems to have a clarity of hate. They will naturally receive the false words, the nasty baseless accusations, the slander and ridicule behind their backs, the lies and attacks ...all as hatred...just as any one of us would! All because the aim therein is directed at the **person** and not their **sin**. That is hate. Black and white. But let us be careful here to not start the 'dance.' If there IS sin in the camp...and we are claiming we are trying to wave off the blind man from the edge of the cliff, then such **requires** interaction with that person. Discussion. Verbal explanation of the danger. Personal and active efforts to intervene. That's why Jesus called upon us to go and be reconciled to our brother before we attempt to approach the presence of the Lord with our sacrifices. Yet very few of those who carry such animosity are so willing to do this.

Biblically speaking, there are positive and negative aspects to hatred. It is acceptable to hate those things that God hates; indeed, this is very much a proof of a right standing with God. "*Let those who love the Lord hate evil*" (Psalm 97:10a). But those within family of God have been covered by the cross, and are thus profoundly loved by God. The Lord speaks concerning hatred also in the Sermon on the Mount: "*But I tell you that anyone who is (even) angry with his brother will be subject to judgment*" (Matthew 5:22).

God may indeed *hate*...certainly there are verses which clearly speak to such. However, His *actions* never changed. He never abandoned being God in order to vent such anger over a personal slight in an ungodly way. His desire is *always* that "all men might be saved" and though discipline may be imparted, it was always done clearly with the intent of reconciliation and repentance of the individual. There was no surprises in what He did or why He did it. Such was never executed in revenge or because God's feelings were bruised. He never lied about them, or slandered them, or called them ugly names to make Himself feel better! Clearly, the *actions* we put forth says it all...in the action of love as well as the action of hate.

We are aware that the act of murder itself was certainly condemned, but hatred is a "heart" sin, and any hateful thought or act is literally an act of murder in God's eyes for which justice will be demanded, possibly not in this life but at the judgment. Luke 6:45 tells us that "*A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*" What that means is our actions are an indicator of what is in our hearts...love or hate. Because what's in there...according to scripture, is *coming out!*

So terrible is the position of hate for a brother before God that John has already told us in chapter 2 verse 9 and 11 that a man who hates is said to be walking in darkness as opposed to the light. But the factual reality is that countless folks continue to profess religion but remain in seething attack mode against a brother. The Scriptures declare that such a person is a liar (1 John 4:20), and he may fool men, but not God. How many believers live for years pretending that all is well, putting on a front, only to be found finally wanting because they have harbored hatred against a fellow believer?

Love for the brethren is manifested in this way: "*And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*" There is nothing cerebral or philosophical about that. It is real, practical, and action oriented. It is what Jesus did for us, and what being a Christian is all about.