

## Love or Hate

1 John 3:11-24

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Love-hate relationships – I think we all experience them. If you have a dog, you may know what I mean. You love your dog when he greets you upon arrival at home and plays with the ball in a cute way. But you hate it when he makes a mess or wants to play when you're super tired. You love your cat when she sits on your lap and purrs away. But hate it when she scratches your furniture. What about your car or truck? Oh you love it when it runs smoothly and you're cruising down the highway. But then it breaks down or winter arrives and reminds you of that problem in your car you've forgot about for 6 months. The super smooth cruiser suddenly becomes a stupid money pit! Or children – they were so beautiful and cute as newborns – now who is this creature that lives in my house? Or your parents – oh – they were the wonderful caregivers through your childhood. Now they forget things, dress funny and regularly embarrass you.

Then there are actual relationships with other people. We fall in love and everything is perfect. Then you see a wart or a deformed toe or snarly mood or less than perfect breath and you wonder what happened to my prince or princess? Or you get along fine with that person for a while. Then something happens and you find yourself on different sides of an argument. You like them but you don't like what they're saying. Love-hate relationships – I think we all experience a sampling of these on a surface level. Maybe we really don't hate the dog or the other person. We're just frustrated at that moment. But there's some people...

**But is it okay to have love and hate in our hearts?** Is it just normal for a segment of our heart to be filled up with love for people we like and get along with and some other segment reserved for some hate towards those who annoy; oppose, hurt or fight against us? If you've ever been involved in a relationship with any person, you know there's times when it's easy to love and other times when it takes a great deal of work. So is it okay to have some love and hate in our hearts?

The Apostle John raises this question for us in the letter he wrote to Christians in the first century. He writes to a people who experienced kind of an exodus from their churches. A bunch had left claiming they had the secret knowledge necessary to be true Christians. But they were way off. John writes to reassure those who stayed of the authenticity of their faith. He gives them tests for their assurance and helps them discern true Christians from questionable ones. One test involved belief. True Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised one from

God. Another test involved morals. True Christians live in a way that shows reverence, respect and humility towards Christ's commands. And the third test concerns love for others. John brings us back to it in the next section of his letter. He reveals there is absolutely no place for hate towards others in the heart of the Christian. So we've got to wrestle with this.

We'll do it by seeking answers to four questions. Why must Christians love each other? What does love or hate in our hearts reveal? What does Gospel-demanding love look like? How can the hate in our hearts be overcome so that we can love?

### **1 John 3:11-18, ESV**

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.

**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.

#### **Why must Christians love one another? (11,16)**

**It was commanded from the beginning.** John reminds his readers in verse 11 that love for others was part of the message from the beginning. Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another just after washing their feet. "A new commandment I give you – Love one another." "This is the how the world will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." Christian communities are supposed to present a clear alternative community of love compared to the world's practice of hate. It is here where people are supposed to receive and give love to one another. This was no late invention or addition to the gospel message. It was a command from the beginning of the church and the time when these readers first heard the message. Outsiders are supposed to be able to say about Christians "my how they love one another."

This love is not the means of our salvation. It is the result of our salvation. In fact, **it is a most appropriate response to our salvation.** In verse 14, John writes "By this we know love, that he (Jesus) laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Jesus died for us. He gave up everything for us. He sacrificed Himself

on our behalf. We need to stop every once in a while and ponder the vastness of this gift. When we recognize it and how much we've been saved from, how can we help but respond with love for others?

It's like stopping to ponder the sacrifice others made so that we might have freedom. With the recent Remembrance Day ceremonies many shows described sacrifices made on behalf of others. One told the story of a man who landed on one of the beaches of Normandy on D-day; June 6, 1944. He survived that dreadful assault. But many of his buddies did not. He returns to Normandy every June 6 to honor those who died. I sense he seems to think that they died instead of him. They took a bullet that he could have taken. So he remembers their sacrifice, honors their memory and wants to live a life of gratitude in response.

We need to regularly come back to the cross for a similar purpose. There we remember what Christ gave. We remember what we've been saved from. Then we think about how we will live in response. The response is "we lay down our lives for our brothers." In a way, we copy Christ's sacrifice for us and offer it to others. But we can't do this in our own strength because it can be difficult. We are not permitted to love only those we think are cool while ignoring others. We are not allowed to only love people we get along well with or share common interests with. Laying down our lives for others and loving them does not depend on our ability to copy Christ's life. It depends on God's ability to reproduce Himself in us. So we need to pray, Lord do your work in me so I can show love for others like you did on the cross.

Why do we need to love one another? It was part of the gospel message from the beginning. It is a most appropriate response to Christ's act of love for us.

But is it really that big of a deal if we have just a little bit of hate in our hearts. Tom, if you knew what that person said or did, you would make an exception. You would understand that there has to be some place in our hearts and lives for those who crossed us or hurt us. Do you find any of this kind of thinking in you right now? Are you trying to justify hate towards that person?

**What does love or hate in my heart reveal? (12-15) Hate may reveal we're of the evil one.** Or at least there's a lot of work to do in our heart. Just a few verses earlier in 3:8, John writes "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning." Verse 10 – By this it is evident who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God nor is the one who does not love his

brother. So he's already talked about children of God and children of the devil. A person who has the devil as their father is not necessarily a Satanist. But they live like Satan. In fact, if there is hate in our heart, it may reveal we're of the evil one.

To prove this, John points back to an Old Testament character who acted on his hate. 1 John 3:12 – We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's sons. The story is told in Genesis 4. Abel became a shepherd. Cain worked the ground as a farmer. They both bring offerings to the Lord. He accepts Abel's offering. But the Lord rejects Cain's offering. Cain gets really angry. He shows this mood on his face. The Lord then speaks to Cain. "Why are you angry and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you but you must rule over it." The Lord rejected Cain's offering because it was given with a wrong heart.

But the Lord offers Cain a way out. Instead Cain is jealous of the Lord's acceptance of his brother's offering. Cain's heart fills with hate. Then he acts on it. He calls Abel to a field and kills him there. John graphically describes this by writing literally "he butchered his brother." That's the end game of hate. People who act on their hate sometimes kill the person they hate. Hate wishes ill on another. Hate desires to see the downfall of another. Hate acted on can result in killing.

When Cain killed Abel, he acted like Satan. Jesus said of the devil in John 8:44 – "He was a murderer from the beginning." Cain acted like this and serves as prototype for the world. It says to hate others is okay. You just hang out with those you love. You fight, speak harshly, and kill those who you hate or at least argue and exclude them.

John goes even further in verse 15. "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Hatred is really murder in the heart. We might think John overstates things. But Jesus used very similar language in the Sermon on the Mount. *"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."*

Why do Jesus and John use such strong language? Ultimately, I think it's out of love. They want to warn listeners to the deadly peril harbored hatred can lead to. Like a warning sign near a cliff, they reveal the danger of

coddled animosity. Hatred leads to other sins. Proverbs 10:12 – Hatred stirs up strife. Proverbs 10:18 – The one who conceals hatred has lying lips. Proverbs 24:26-28 - Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, don't believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred be covered with deception, his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. So hate in our hearts is no small little mosquito to ignore but a ravenous lion threatening to devour us.

Now in saying “no murderer has eternal life abiding in him,” John does not exclude the possibility that a murderer can repent and receive forgiveness for this sin. But anyone who murders and thinks that's okay is not walking with Christ. It's rather a sign of someone who walks in darkness. Unrepentant murderers walk in darkness along with those who harbor hate in their hearts. So if there is hate in us, it reveals either we're not of God or there's some serious work to be done on our hearts.

But if we find love for others in our heart, what does that reveal? Verse 14 – “We know we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.” **Love for others reveals that we have passed from the realm of death to the realm of life.** When someone obeys the law of love, it presents evidence that they have passed over from death to life. It's like they have moved from one side of a riverbank to the other side. They have moved from the death realm to the life realm. They have moved from the negative realm of hate that seeks another's harm and leads to activity against him. They have moved to the positive realm of love that seeks the other person's good, and leads to activity for him, even to the point of self-sacrifice.

Notice John does not say “it's a great possibility that you've passed from death to life.” *We know* as a fact that we have passed from death to life. The fact that we love our brothers gives us a good ground for certainty that we possess eternal life. Love for others then is a test for an authentic Christian faith.

So we've seen that we must love each other because it's commanded by Christ and a most appropriate response to Christ laying down his life for us. We've seen that hate for others may reveal we're not of God or at least we've got something major to work on. Love for others reveals we have crossed from death to life.

**What does Gospel demanding love look like? (16-18)** It is not like Cain who murdered his brother. It does not allow hate to fester towards someone. It is laying down our lives for others like Jesus laid his life down for us. But what does that look like in every day life? Verse 17 - “But if anyone has the world's goods and see his brother in need,

yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" John imagines a scenario where a Christian has some money or means. Then they see another Christian or person in need. This is not just a quick glance. They have a prolonged look at this needy brother or sister or family. Then they close their heart. John says, if that happens, we've got a heart problem. He asks "How does God's love abide in Him?" If you're a Christian, you've been shown so much love by Christ. He laid down his life for you. He gave Himself to you and put His spirit in you. He's given you resources and means. Then you see someone in need. But instead of showing them love by meeting their needs with some of your resources, you close your heart to them? Does God's love even abide in you? Or are you so self-absorbed you don't notice? Or are you so self-focused that you can't spare some of your resources to help another in need. That seems to be the tone of John's address here. Then he concludes "Little children – Christians – let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth." Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. How do you respond when you see another in need?

Over the last 10 days, the world has watched the tragedy of Typhoon Yolanda's aftermath in the Philippines. Devastating winds, rain and storm surge has displaced hundreds of thousands. I'm connected to our little school in the Philippines called the Bicol Center for Christian Leadership. Many of the students in that school live near or below the poverty line in the Philippines. Others live with so much less than we have. Yet over the last 10 days, they've collected and packed up relief supplies for the people hardest hit. (Food packs bound for Tacloban City. Too small for an enormous need? The Lord can multiply that. Our faithfulness in the little that we have is God's measurement of how much He can trust us with more! Continue giving!) They haven't just wished well in words. They've used some of their material goods to meet the needs of others. This is what John is talking about.

Love one another. Not based on how attractive they are or how much we like them. It's based on their needs and God's call. Love for others is a mark of being loved by God and beginning to act like God. That explains 1 Corinthians 13:13 – "Now these three abide; faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Why? Because God does not exercise faith or hope. But God is love. If we are transformed into God's nature by the new birth, then love will characterize us too.

So what's in your heart? Is there a little bit of hate? Hate, a lot of hate and a little love, a little hate and a lot of love, love?

## How can we address or overcome hate in our hearts so that we can then show love to others?

- If you discover hate in your heart or if the Holy Spirit has revealed hate in your heart:
  - If it's hatred towards another person in this body – then deal with it – confess it – work it out. Remember how much Christ loved you and how much you've been forgiven. Then respond with love.
  - If it's hatred towards someone in your family – take steps to work it out – make the first move.
  - If it's hatred towards someone who doesn't know, confess it to them and work it out.
  - If it's hatred towards someone who has deeply wounded you and refuses to repent – cry out to the Lord – for His help; justice; power; strength, for release from hate . Ask others to pray for you.
  - If it's hatred towards yourself – realize that Christ laid down His life for you and demonstrated His love deeply to you. Receive His love and allow His love to flow through you to others.
  - If it's a hatred that you have because you don't know Christ at all – He calls you to come to him and stop living life under that crippling, life-draining, energy-sucking burden of hate. There is no hate too great for Christ to deal with. Christ laid down His life to pay for the sin of your hatred. He sent the Spirit to empower us to live lives of love. So turn to Christ – call out for His mercy – trust Him and what He has done. He will come in and you will begin the lifelong journey of learning to love.

Maybe you think it's too late for you. Maybe the hate in your heart is so deep that you think it can't be overcome.

Listen to Austin's story for some perspective on that.

He writes – “My name is Austin. I'm 20 - I'd like to tell you how found [Jesus](#), and how I'm now living free from hate, [depression](#), and confusion about my life.

I was raised by parents who grew apart by drinking and doing drugs. By the time I was in junior high school, I started partying. I said to myself, "When I get out of high school, I will just be able to quit because that is how life is!" Well that is what I believed, anyway.

A couple of years passed, and in ninth grade I decided to pull the fire alarm at school because I didn't care about what the world had to offer me. This got me on probation. And I kept doing the same things I was doing before.

Down the road I went to the juvenile detention center a few times. I also went into foster care while my mom and dad were in prison. Finally I went back home because I was 18. So, I partied even more, and a few months later

I met a girl. She became my new focus. We hit it off for about eight months. She was my first love. Three months into our relationship, I told her I loved her and she said she loved me also. Truthfully, I was wrong.

She got pregnant, and even though it was good at first, we grew apart because I was immature. On February 12, 2009, our little girl was born! But the sad part is I wasn't able to be there for her birth. At this point in my life, I didn't know what to do. I had just given up. I got heavily back into drugs for about two years. I realized I wasn't having fun or loving the life anymore. I went back to get my diploma. I tried playing sports, football and baseball and then I became a runner for a drug trafficker.

I ran drugs so I could get high. But then, in one night my life changed forever. I got tackled by the major crimes unit. As the police were yelling, I heard a voice saying, "Are you done yet!? Are you done yet!?" The voice didn't stop until I screamed yes! I was confused because I've never experienced anything like that. As I said yes, the cop asked, "What's the problem?" I said, "Nothing."

Well, then the policeman said, "You are lucky because we have no need for you anymore!"

I was stunned. The cop stated, "Son, you're 20 years old. Go make something of yourself."

Later that night I asked my mother how to be saved and how to follow Jesus. Her life had already been turned around by God. She said, "Son, I prayed for your trafficker to get caught, and for you to have a relationship with God.

I went to church with my mom, and when I walked in the building, I felt loved. But, even better (remember I got busted the other night) ... I heard the pastor say, "All of us will go through trials and dark experiences before the Lord will save us, because Jesus uses us as witnesses to the world." These words made me fall to my knees. It's so true. God wants us to call on his Son, Jesus Christ. Well, today I'm saved. All my sins are forgiven. My old self was crucified at the cross with Jesus, and I am born again spiritually. I am clean today. I'm going to college. I have my family back, and I am changed forever. I hope you learned something from my story and this message from God. I don't want you to have to be tormented by Satan, the devil, as I have been. Thanks to Jesus, I am living free from the hate I carried, the partying, the depression, and everything that caused confusion in my life.<sup>1</sup>

The same can be true for you if you only turn to Him with what is in your heart so that we can fully and freely love one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed November 21, 2013 <http://christianity.about.com/od/drugandalcoholaddiction/a/Living-Free.htm>