

Love in Action 1 John 3:16-24

How do we know that we have the love of God in our hearts and lives? If you are like most of us, we don't feel that we are doing enough to tell God thank for the gifts of grace, love and salvation!

Let me tell you a love story that I heard a year ago and was reminded of this past week. I was at a conference and one of the exercises was to tell something extraordinary that we have done in our lives to help others. I was paired up with a woman with whom I had worked professionally, but I didn't know personally until that day. She said that her greatest act of love and unselfishness was when we married her husband and gave birth to her son. I knew of her husband as he was a Detroit area lawyer who was in partnership with his father. The family had been member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). I knew she and the husband had one son about the age of my son George. I knew that the husband had died and I even remember getting to the funeral home before the family and acquaintances arrived to comfort her. What I didn't know was that she had married a friend who loved her and trusted her with his truth. At the time of his proposal he knew that he had cancer and would not live long, but his desire was to marry and have a child. This would mean that she would change her plans, marry her friend and have this child that she might have to raise alone, depending on how long he was able to live. I remembered parts of conversation...her sincere prayers to God when their child was young that God allow her husband to live until the child was no longer a baby in arms....not while the child was in elementary school....please wait until the child was in middle school....Lord can't you wait until the child gets to high school. Then the prayers changed to Lord thank you that you have given my husband life to see his son graduate high school...Lord

thank you for allowing him to see his son go off to college. So when her husband died and the son finished college and is now an accountant in New England she is now getting her Ph. D., knowing that she had shown extraordinary love to her husband and son. On Friday she described her late husband as her best friend. I tell you this because this is the kind of love that God wants us to have.

What is the test of Christian love? It is not simply failure to do evil to others. Love also involves doing them good. Christian love is both positive and negative. “Cease to do evil; learn to do well” (Isa. 1:16–17).

In the passage before our scripture Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, was given as our example of false love. Cain said he loved his brother Abel, but his actions proved that Cain hated his brother when he murdered the brother. On the other hand Christ is the example of true Christian love. Jesus gave His life for us that we may experience truth. Every Christian knows John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” But do we pay much attention to 1 John 3:16: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”

Christian love involves sacrifice and service. Christ did not simply talk about His love; He died to prove it (Rom. 5:6–10). That was love in action! Jesus was not killed as a martyr; He willingly laid down His life (John 10:11–18; 15:13). “Self-preservation” is the first law of physical life, but “self-sacrifice” is the first law of spiritual life.

You are looking at me strange, but the good news is that God does not ask us to lay down our lives. God simply asks us to help a brother or sister in need. It is easy for us to talk about loving the “church” and to neglect to help a single Christian. Christian love is personal and active.

This is what Jesus had in mind in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). A lawyer wanted to talk about an abstract subject: “Who is my neighbor?” But Jesus focused attention on one man in need because he had been robbed and left for died, and changed the question to, “To whom can I be a neighbor?”

The story is told of two friends who were attending a conference on evangelism. During one of the sessions, Larry missed Pete. At luncheon, when he saw Pete, he said, “I missed you at the 10 o’clock session. It was really terrific! Where were you?”

“I was in the lobby talking to a bellhop about Christ. I led him to the Lord,” said Pete.

I had a similar experience in 1999 at the General Assembly. JoAnn Burriss and I had traveled together. When we met up I asked what she had been doing and she explained that she had spent her time in the lobby of her hotel having conversation about the love of God and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

There is nothing wrong with attending conferences, but it is easy to forget the individual and his or her needs while discussing generalities. The test of Christian love is not in loud professions about loving the whole church, but in quietly helping a brother or sister who is in need. If we do not even help a brother or sister, it is not likely we would “lay down our lives” for “the church.”

When we ignore the brother or sister, or be indifferent toward their needs we sin. A believer who has material goods and can relieve a brother or sister’s needs ought to do it. To “close the door of one’s heart” on the brother or sister is like a kind of murder!

If I am going to help my brother or sister, I must meet three conditions. First, I must have the means necessary to meet his or her need. Second, I must know that the need exists. Third, I must be loving enough to want to share.

A believer who is too poor to help, or who is ignorant of his brother or sister's need, is not condemned. But a believer who hardens his or her heart against their needy brother or sister is condemned. One reason we Christians should work is so that we may be able "to give to on in need" (Eph. 4:28).

In these days of multiplied social agencies, it is easy for us Christians to forget our obligations. "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10).

This "work for the good of all" does not need to be in terms of money or material supplies. It may include personal service and the giving of oneself to others. There are many individuals in our churches who lack love and would welcome friendship.

A young mother admitted, in a testimony meeting, that she never seemed to find time for her own personal devotions. She had several little children to care for, and the hours melted away.

Imagine her surprise when two of the ladies from the church appeared at her front door.

"We've come to take over," they explained. "You go into the bedroom and get started on your devotions." After several days of this kind of help, the young mother was able to develop her devotional life so that the daily demands on her time no longer upset her.

I know that one of the most precious gifts I have received had nothing to do with money, it was the gift of having a prayer partner. One day at a Christian women's meeting we were talking about how we were going to have workshops, raise money and give gifts. But I explained that with all the pressures that women experience day after day what we really needed was prayer. Those sisters stopped what they were doing and chose prayer partners. I have had the pleasure of the past few years of praying with and for Carolyn Hill. She prayed me through many

issues and I shared her journey through her husband's retirement, her father's death and illness of siblings. No amount of money could have done so much in our lives.

If we want to experience and enjoy the love of God in our own hearts, we must love others, even to the point of sacrifice. Being indifferent to a brother or sister's needs means robbing ourselves of what we need even more: the love of God in our hearts. It is a matter of love or death! We need love in action.

This week I had an experience that reminded me of this scripture. Many of you know that on yesterday we had a called regional assembly to vote on the name of Rev. Eugene W. James, Jr. for the position of regional minister. Some came to the event with the expressed purpose for blocking the affirmative vote. It was clear that there had been a campaign to say that the candidate was unqualified and undeserving of the position. Therefore many people that said that they loved Rev. James showed by their actions that there was no love and respect. In fact they made various statement to imply they were supportive of the man, but concerned about the budget and the process, but is was very suspicious that spoke against the candidate said words that I had heard from other lips in times past.

True Christian love means loving in action and in truth. Here is an example of love "in word":

"If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled'; and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" (James 2:15–16, NASB)

To love "in word" means simply to talk about a need, but to love "in action" means to do something about meeting the need. You may think, because you have discussed a need, or even prayed about it, that you have done your duty, but love involves more than words—it calls for sacrificial actions.

To love "in tongue" is the opposite of to love "in action and truth." It means to love insincerely. To love "in truth" means to love a person genuinely, from the

heart and not just from the tongue. People are attracted by genuine love, but repelled by the artificial variety. One reason why sinners were attracted to Jesus (Luke 15:1–2) was because they were sure He loved them sincerely.

“But it cost a great deal for the believer to exercise this kind of love?”

Remember it cost Jesus Christ His life. But the wonderful benefits that come to us as by-products of this love more than compensate for any sacrifice we make. To be sure, we do not love others because we want to get something in return, but the Bible principle, “Give and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 6:38), applies to love as well as to money.

John names three wonderful blessings that will come to us who practice Christian love.

First we have assurance (vv. 19–20). Our relationship with others affects our relationship with God. A person who is not right with their brother or sister should go settle the matter before they offer their sacrifices on the altar (cf. Matt. 5:23–24). A Christian who practices love grows in their understanding of God’s truth and enjoys a heart filled with confidence before God.

Second we have answered prayer (vv. 21–22). Love for the church produces confidence toward God, and confidence toward God gives us boldness in asking for what we need. This does not mean that we earn answers to prayer by loving the church. Rather, it means that our love for the church proves that we are living in the will of God where God can answer our prayer. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments” (1 John 3:22). Love is the fulfilling of God’s Law (Rom. 13:8–10); therefore, when we love the church, we are obeying His commandments and He is able to answer our requests.

Third, we abide (vv. 23–24). When a scribe asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment, He replied, “You shall love the Lord your God.” Then He added a second commandment: “You shall love thy neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:34–

40). But God also gives us one commandment that takes in both God and man: “believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” (1 John 3:23). Faith toward God and love toward others sum up a Christian’s obligations. Christianity is “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). This is the life of joy and liberty, the life of answered prayer. It assures you confidence and courage in spite of the difficulties of life. ^{1 2 3}

What God requires is love in action! Amen.

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Jn 3:16

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:897

³ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters of John and Jude*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976, S. 81