



ROSE
HILL
CHURCH

1 John 3:11-18
Encouragement: 1 John
“The Necessity of Love”

Rev. Brian North
October 22nd, 2023

Today we continue in our series in the New Testament Letter of First John. In this, John has written some things that are, in a broad sense, encouraging the Christians to whom he writes, and now to us. He encourages them in the truth of who Jesus is and what they’ve been taught about him, he encourages them to remain steadfast in that faith; He encourages them to remain free from sin and to instead remain in Jesus; He encourages them to keep the commands of Jesus; to love one another and not to love the world, and even more.

So, let’s turn to 1 John 3:11-18 and see what it is that John is encouraging us about, in today’s passage. We will read just the first verse to start with, then continue on in a bit...(1 John 3:11).

So, his first word of encouragement here is that the message they have heard from the beginning is to love one another. This is exactly what Jesus says to the disciples in the Gospel of John, when he says, “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another**” (Jesus, in John 13:34-35). So, this commandment to love comes from Jesus. It’s new when he gives it to them, because he’s the one setting the example now. And John is reminding them in this verse that this is the commandment that they heard from the beginning. This is part of the core message of the gospel that they were taught when they first became Christians.

You can’t introduce someone to Jesus or become a follower of Jesus without first: learning about the love that God has for us in Jesus; second: learning about the love that we have in response for him and for other believers (the emphasis in this passage); and third, learning about the command to love other people outside the faith as well, so as to lead them toward Jesus. So, this is a multi-faceted love, that is rooted in God’s love. It starts with him. It’s not that we love God so greatly, but that he loves us. That’s the start, and our love flows out of that and is in response to it.

Now, as you heard, this verse begins with “For...” It’s a transitional word that gives the sense that what follows is the result of, or follows after, what comes before. And in the previous verses, John is comparing and contrasting people who live as children of God who follow his ways with those who are, as he puts it, “children of the devil.” Verse 10 kind of summarizes it all when he writes, **“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister” (1 John 3:10).** Then we get today’s verse 11, “For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” Those who do who love one another are the children of God. They are living as his children. All people are created in his image, but not all live into that reality, and some become children of the devil as he writes in verse 10.

Then he goes into what feels like a bit of an aside if you don’t keep in mind the big picture of this entire chapter. Because if you skip ahead, verse 16 says, “This is how we know what love is.” It’s like 16 should follow right after verse 11, because they’re both talking about love. So, let’s read **1 John 3:12-15.**

So, what’s going on here? In essence, **John is pulling from Genesis 4 where we read about Cain murdering his brother Abel, and John is using it as an illustration of what it means to be a “child of the devil” (verse 10).** It’s not loving...it’s what happens when sin gets a foothold in our lives, takes root, and we live with sin ruling our hearts instead of the love of God ruling our hearts.

So, what happened with Cain and Abel? Maybe some of us know, and perhaps some of us don’t. Cain and Abel were the first two children of Adam and Eve. Abel was a rancher, and Cain was a crop farmer. Here’s what we read about them in Genesis 4, **“In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you**

angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.” (Genesis 4:3-8).

The question (among others, for sure) that comes to our minds is, “Why did God accept Abel’s offering but not Cain’s?” Was the thing he offered wrong? Cain is never told that a crop sacrifice would be considered insufficient compared to an animal sacrifice. In a few weeks, we’re going to turn pledge cards in for our financial commitment to 2024. Can you imagine if God was displeased with your pledged offering because you worked at Amazon instead of Microsoft? Or at a hardware store instead of a fabric store? Or money you earned as a snowboard instructor instead of teaching skiing? Well...maybe that one we can understand. 😊 But you get the point. It doesn’t seem right. So, what’s going on?

Some people have said it’s because his offering didn’t include shed blood, whereas Abel’s offering was a blood sacrifice...a life lost and offered, like the Old Testament sacrifice of a lamb or a dove that we read about later, and a foreshadowing of Jesus’s death on the cross. The problem is that those worship rules had not yet been established, so it’s hard to believe he’s being held accountable to that.

In the New Testament, the author of Hebrews gives some insight into this that is helpful. He writes, **“By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead” (Hebrews 11:4).** Abel brought his offering in faith...as a step of faith, as an act of faith, and that is what made the offering better, and acceptable. The Genesis passage conveys this when it says that Abel brought first-fruits...the firstborn of his flock. In other words, before he had an abundance of animals, he gave, trusting that God would provide more. He had faith that more would come. Cain did not bring his in faith, perhaps bringing his offering only once he had an abundance of crops.

I would also add that the murder he committed is not only a sin on its own, but an outgrowth of sin that had already taken root in Cain's heart: jealousy, hatred, resentment, and so forth. Perhaps Cain brought his offering while this stuff still resided in him, rather than dealing with it through confession and repentance. So, John mentions it here because it's an illustration of what it means to live without love for one's brother or sister – whether that's blood brother or sister as we see in Genesis, or brother or sister in Jesus as is the case for the Christians to whom John writes. Instead of love reigning, it is sin that reigns in us otherwise. And so, after this illustration of what NOT to do, he then returns to what TO do: Love one another.

How many of you remember the Foreigner song from the mid-1980's that was titled, "I want to know what love is"? In a stroke of prophetic genius, the answer to the longing expressed in that song is given in verse 16. This is 1900 years before the song was sung. You want to know what love is? Here's the answer, in **1 John 3:16**, "**This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us**" (**1 John 3:16a**). Jesus shows us what love is. He is the answer to this longing. Notice the contrast with Cain and Abel. Abel loses his life, but it's against his will. It's forced upon him as Cain murders him in anger. **The positive example of love from Jesus is also one of death, but it's an act of love because Jesus willingly lays his life down for us.** Jesus willingly went to the cross because of his great love for you and me, with the effect being that our sin is wiped away and we are brought into a right relationship with our heavenly father through faith in Jesus. This is incredible news, amen? And John is saying this is how we know what love is. This kind of selflessness, giving, sacrificial action is what love is. Let's finish out the passage. (**1 John 3:16-18**)

Jesus followers are commanded to love one another, with a love that is modeled after Jesus' love. Some people are literally martyred for their faith. For most of us, the sacrifices we make for the sake of ministry are a little less permanent. We sacrifice some purchases because we've given financially to the church; we sacrifice some time because we're serving in ministries at the church. There are people who are here on Saturday for a work party or a special event like the Trunk-or-Treat, they run the soundboard or sing in the choir or do something else in worship leadership the next morning in church,

then they count the money that's collected in worship. The next Sunday, they're teaching a kids' class when the children are dismissed from church. That's an expression of love, love in action, for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So: These last few verses are meant to encourage us, and spur us on, to love the people in our church in tangible, real ways, with action. John gives this example about helping someone in need out of one's abundance of material possessions (earlier, a worship sacrifice out of abundance, was a negative example of faith]...and if a believer doesn't help, then he says, "how can the love of God be in them?" Friends, we have real needs here at Rose Hill, real opportunities to love one another, that are going unmet, that would help make disciples of Jesus here at RH.

And if I can just be a little vulnerable and open here for a moment...The thing that burdens me most right now about our church is that we've got so much potential...in fact, let me pause for a moment. We have an incredible history as a church; we have amazing people at Rose Hill now; we've got a fantastic church building that, yes, needs some TLC and maybe updated some...but it's an amazing church building (I get 2-3 contacts every year from realtors representing churches in the area wondering if we're interested in selling our property...they *covet* our church facilities); we've got great staff who work hard and lead well in their areas of gifting and ministry passions; we live in a community that needs Jesus desperately whether they know it or not...so there's *so much* opportunity here. But I've been burdened lately, and I know other leaders in the church have been as well... And what burdens me is that we've got quite a few gaps in ministry areas. We are falling short of living into what God is calling us to as a church because we are not living out these verses and others like them throughout Scripture as well as we could. It's the post-pandemic blahs...we're not the only church with this struggle. But I would be a bad pastor if I didn't share honestly this.

And I know a number of you are serving here a lot and you're generously giving financially. Others of you are sitting there thinking, "I'd love to help how I used to, but my body just won't do it anymore." I get it. Basketball used to be a ministry for me. Several people have become part of the RH

family because of it...but after two knee surgeries due to injuries from other activities, my knees can't do basketball anymore. So, I get it. What we do in ministry shifts, sometimes. All that to say, there are many of you have given sacrificially and are giving sacrificially with your time, your talent, and your treasure. And if that's you...Thank you so much...not that you're doing it for me – you're doing it for God and as an act of love for your brothers and sisters here at Rose Hill – but I think God would say, and the church says, “Thank you.” “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21).

Now: If you're not involved in ministry (loving our brothers and sisters), I would simply encourage you to take these verses to heart and consider how you can love your brothers and sisters here at Rose Hill. How can you love be put into action, as Jesus did, as these verses invite us to do? This kind of love is a necessary ingredient for a church to flourish, and for its people to flourish as disciples of Jesus. Loving with action is what Jesus did. He came, he ministered, he taught, he disciplined 12 guys plus a whole bunch of others...in his ultimate act of love he laid down his life for us at the cross, and after his resurrection the Church was born...and here we are, in that same tradition 2,000 years later.

I would simply ask you this morning, in light of these verses, to consider how you might love your brothers and sisters here at Rose Hill. What are we each doing, what are we sacrificing, what are we giving to step out in faith like Abel, so the gospel message, the good news of Jesus, would grow in you, and then in others? My prayer is that Jesus' love would inspire you to this kind of sacrifice...that the words of this passage would spur us on to love others in this way. Jesus has done it for you. And now it's our turn to love the way Jesus did, so others would come to faith and be disciplined as well. Let's pray...Amen.