

Week Six: Called to Love

OPENING PRAYER

READ | 1 John 3:11-4:6

¹¹This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹²Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ¹³Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ¹⁹This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence ²⁰whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²²and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. ²³And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

¹Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

⁴You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

DISCUSS

1. How does verse 16 define love? What characterizes this love, i.e. what's a primary distinctive of 'Christ-like' love? Why is this kind of love so hard to enact?

[The test: is it sacrificial? Love is defined as that which requires a person to lay down his life, i.e. surrender his self interests. Truly loving, then, is action-defined, not feeling-defined, and puts what's best for another first. Why is it hard? Because we are naturally self-consumed, fearful and proud.]

2. How do verses 17-20 inform the believer's attitudes and actions toward 'brothers [and sisters] in need'? In what ways does the love demonstrated by Jesus (v. 16) set a standard for the kind of love we are called to show each other?

[Let us love not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (v. 18). Love is to be radical, intentional, absorbing, patient, and initiating. How does this question related to those who are in financial need, and also to those in emotional, physical, mental and spiritual need. People everywhere are in need all the time. How are we to serve others and allow ourselves to be served?]

3. In verse 23, John distills what God commands: believe the gospel of Jesus is true, and live like the gospel of Jesus is true. Put another way: know that Jesus Christ is Lord and love each other sacrificially. Is this really all

that Jesus asks of his followers? If so, why are these two simple commands arguably the most difficult of all commands for us to obey?

[This is what God commands, because these two together form an umbrella over any other 'command' you can think of. 'Love God and your neighbor' is the Apostle Paul's summary of the entire law. If this seems simple, it is. But it's also comprehensive, the foundation of all that God requires. Why so difficult to obey? Because our wiring is to deny this two-part command. Sin by definition is 'anti' everything this command prescribes. What comes most naturally to our hearts is the polar opposite of this command.]

APPLY

- I. John writes, "[T]his is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us." Describe the connection between the role of the Holy Spirit and the believer's 'ability' to love others as she's been called... that is, sacrificially. If you've experienced this personally, describe the nature of your 'ability' or willingness to love others sacrificially 'by or with' the Spirit; describe the nature of your love for others apart from the Spirit.

CLOSING PRAYER

- Prayer suggestions:*
- > That we would look to Christ's love not only as a model for the love we are called to show one another, but also as a refuge for us when we fail to love others well.
 - > That our love for God would grow as we see more and more the nature of his love for us, demonstrated most clearly and perfectly in the person and work of Jesus Christ
 - > That our love for God would grow as we see what he calls us to, and the type of love he calls us to demonstrate toward others.