

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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The Measure Of Love

First John 3:16-18

by

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SUBJECT: THE LOVE GOD COMMANDS

TITLE: THE MEASURE OF LOVE

TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:16-18

INTRODUCTION. I love the some of the three-sixteens of the New Testament. For example, there is John 3:16: *AFor God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*@ Before leaving that verse, let me read it to you in the new Holman Christian Standard Bible: *A For God love the world in this way: He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*@ It may take a while for that translation to Agrow on you@, but the translators sought to emphasize the certainty of eternal life with the word, Awill@. Rather than Ashould not@, they used Awill not@. Those who believe in Jesus Christ definitely Awill not perish@, but will absolutely have eternal life.

And then there is 1 Timothy 3:16: *AAnd by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.*@ And of course there is 2 Timothy 3:16, which teaches us that *AAll Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;*@ (verse 17 completes that statement: *Athat the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*@).

Perhaps the most difficult of those three-sixteen verses in the first verse in our text today: *AWe know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*@ How is that verse more difficult than any other? Oh, we see what it says - we can read it, quote it, explain it, teach it, even meditate on it. In fact, we may even recall the names of some who have actually laid down their lives Afor the brethren.@ But have we appropriated that truth and applied it in our own Christian life? What have you done with that verse? And please don=t respond that if you had really applied that verse you wouldn=t be here to answer the question! Let us look a little more closely now.

I. GOD SETS BEFORE US THE STANDARD OF CHRISTIAN LOVE, 1 JOHN 3:16.

A. God Wants You to Know Godly Love, 3:16a.

1. He wants you to know that He loves you.
2. He wants you to know that He loves other believers.
3. He wants you to know that He loves lost people.
4. He wants us to love one another.

ILLUSTRATION: Dolly Madison, wife of the fourth president of the United States, was one of the most popular women in American history. Wherever she went, she charmed and captivated everyone obscure and well-known, rich and poor, men and women alike.

She was once asked to explain the secret of her power over others. Surprised by the question Mrs. Madison exclaimed, "Power over people. I have none. I desire none. I merely love everyone." And those who love are richly rewarded by love returned.

5. Love for one another is proof that we have passed from death unto life, 3:14.

B. Jesus Set the Standard for Love When He Laid Down His Life For You, 3:16b.

1. His life was not taken from Him.
2. He gave His life for you and me.
3. Jesus died twice on the cross.

When Jesus declared, *It is finished*, He had completed the sacrifice for you and me. He had taken our sins upon Himself. Paul wrote, *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (2 Cor. 5:21). Ryrie is right: *Here is the heart of the gospel: The sinless Savior has taken our sins that we might have God's righteousness* (RSB). After Jesus declared His sacrifice to be completed, He then *yielded up His spirit*.

4. It is true that Jesus died for us.
 - a. Many people have died for others.
 - b. Soldiers have thrown themselves on hand grenades to save their friends.
 - c. Firemen and policemen are prepared to give their lives to protect us.
 - d. Jesus, however, did something for us none of those could ever do.
5. Jesus did not just die, He gave His life, the just for the unjust.
6. The death of Jesus is the measure of which love is defined and understood.

C. AWe Know Love By This@ Sets the Standard for Christian Love.

Please do not miss this. From the time of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the measure of godly love has been set. That is the standard for love. Any time we want to take personal inventory, all we have to do is look back to the greatest manifestation of love in time or eternity. If we ever feel that we have arrived, look to Jesus. If you are ever tempted to boast of your love for others, look to Jesus. In His death on the cross, we do not have one fallen man dying for another, either on impulse or in premeditation. He Who knew no sin died for creatures who were set in rebellion against Him. *ABut God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us@* (Rom. 5:8).

D. AWe ought to lay down our lives for the brethren@, 3:16c.

1. Because Jesus laid down His life for us we should A lay down our lives for the brethren.@

The message here is not that we should go out and seek martyrdom in the normal sense of the word. We are told that there were some early believers who foolishly forfeited their lives because they thought they would have a greater reward if they died the death of a martyr. Is that not what the Islamic suicide-murderers are doing? The emphasis in this Scripture is not so much on dying as it is in giving life. Jesus gave His life for you and He expects you to give your life for the brethren.

2. It may be more difficult to live for others than to die for them.
3. It may be more important to live for others than to die for them.
4. It may be more noble to live for others than to die for them.
5. No spiritual power is required to live than die for another person.
6. Spiritual power is required to give your life as Jesus gave His life for us.

Jesus died twice on the cross. You must die physically for yourself, no one else can do that for you. Only Jesus could die for others spiritually, you cannot do that. Jesus laid down His life Afor@ us. The word Afor@ implies - no, demands substitutionary atonement, as prophesied in Isaiah 53.

We cannot die Afor@ another in this sense of the word, but this passage from 1 John stresses that we Aought to lay down our lives for the brethren.@ This really is a difficult verse. One commentator said, AWe may never have an opportunity to do that, but we can give of our substance.@ While that is true, that does not fulfill the demands of this verse. You may at some time be called on to lay down your life for another person. Often, in this world, when that happens one lays down his life for a family member - which lost people may do as readily as a Christian.

When I was a young pastor living in Bastrop, Louisiana, I answered a knock at the door one

afternoon and immediately recognized my two visitors. Jehovah=s Witnesses! The older man was small and the younger one was much taller. Both men were Black, some of the early Black people to become involved with the Jehovah=s Witnesses.

The older man began, AYou tell your people right over there,@ pointing to the church, Ato love one another and they go and kill their brother!@ I asked him to repeat what he had said. I still do not know if I didn=t understand it or just couldn=t believe he said it. He repeated it and waited for a response. When I asked for an explanation, he said, AYou tell your people to love one another and they go off and kill their brothers in war.@

I said, ABaptists have fought and bled and died to keep this country free so people like you can walk up and down the street doing what you are doing right now. And, as far as I am concerned, a man who will not fight to defend his country is like a man who will not fight to defend his home. He is not much of a man.@ I had never taken the class from the Interfaith Witness Department at the time, as my answer proves. But the point here is that unsaved people, and Christians who were not walking in the spirit have died for family, friend, and country throughout human history. What we are looking at here must go beyond that.

We must daily give life for others. We must live for them, make an investment of our time, talent, and energy in the lives of others. We must not simply live for ourselves, and our families, we must live our lives for and before others in such a way that lost people will be won to Jesus Christ, and in such a way that other Christians will be blessed by our ministry, testimony, and fellowship.

II. LET US LOVE IN DEED AND IN TRUTH, 1 JOHN 3:17-18.

ABut whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.@

A. Christians Demonstrate Love By Ministering to Those in Need, 3:17.

1. The question in Verse 17 demands a negative response.
2. Godly love does not abide in one who is selfish.
3. Godly love does not abide in one who is insensitive.
4. Godly love is not foolish, but it is generous.

A group of ladies from a rural church met to discuss mission opportunities in their community. When one particular family was mentioned, a lady who owned a country store began opposing any help for this family. She went on and on about how the children, wasted money: AIf you give them a dime

they will just spend it on candy.@ Another lady responded, AI don=t think we should withhold help for the family because their children spend a nickel or a dime on candy. We don=t have to give them money anyway. We can buy clothes and groceries for them.@

After some discussion, the ladies decided to take up a small offering and use the money to but some clothes for the children and groceries for the family. Now, guess who volunteered to take the money and go to town and buy the things they decided on - and take them to the needy family. You are right. It was the lady who sold the candy in her little country store.

5. There are generous people who are not Christians.

When I was moving to Mississippi College for my freshman year, my parents drove me to school. Few students, especially freshmen had cars in those days. My parents drove me from our home at Sledge, Mississippi to Meridian to visit my mother=s brother and sister and their families before going on to Mississippi College. When Mother=s brother learned where I was going, he said, AI have three cars out front. Pick one of them out and take it with you.@ The cars were only two or three years old and in good condition. I asked him, AWhat if something happens to it?@ He said, AJust pull it off on the side of the road and walk off and leave it.@ Hey, he meant it. He was not a Christian and had not been in church very many times since he was a child. I thought it was a great idea, but my father shot the idea down - questions about liability insurance and other expenses which I some how had not considered. My uncle was very generous. I have known other lost people who were generous.

6. There are some selfish Christians.

The husband of the lady who was opposed to helping the needy family had moved to the area, rented some land and started planting cotton. For years, he borrowed a neighbor=s tractor, disk, harrow, and other implements to prepare his land. He borrowed his tractor and cultivator to plow his cotton. After several years, he was able to buy his own tractor and a few implements. Not long after that, he was overheard telling someone he was not going to let his neighbors borrow any of his equipment and wear it out like his neighbor and land owner had done. Both men were members of the same church. One was generous, the other selfish.

7. John is talking about something beyond a natural spirit of generosity.

B. John Is Talking About the Agape= Type of Love in Its Practical Expression.

1. Agape= is a mental attitude love.
2. A mental attitude love can be commanded.
3. An emotions driven love cannot be commanded.

Paul wrote, *ALet this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.*@ When you begin to think like

Jesus you will begin to act like Jesus. When you think like Jesus you will be motivated to help those who are in need of your service or your material possessions. Let me stress this one thing: loving your spouse or child does not necessarily fulfill the Second Great Commission. There is no merit in loving those you should naturally love. While great emphasis is needed on loving family members in a biblical and godly way, we can do that and still fall short of God's perfect will for us.

C. A Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth@, 3:18.

1. We are commanded not to love in word only.
2. It is often easier to pay lip service than to render practical service.
3. Some had rather invest words than shoe leather.
4. We are commanded to show our love in deeds.

This applies to practical service. The early church understood this principle:

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need@ (Acts 2:44-45).

Jesus explains the principle and provides the motivation for this service:

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me@ (Matt. 25:35-40).

5. We are commanded to show our love in truth.

Christians must demonstrate their love for others in deed and truth.@ We understand what it means to show love in deed@, but what does it mean to show love in truth@? In the first place, AThe Truth@ in Scripture refers to Jesus, and Atruth@ usually denotes sound doctrine. We must show love in deed, but that does not mean we are to disregard sound principles. Godly love is generous but not foolish. For example, if there is reason to believe a person will spend any money you give him on alcohol or drugs, you had better determine what his needs are and help with groceries or the rent.

A teenager in Bastrop, Louisiana, once brought a man to my house and introduced him to me. The man had asked him for money. I listened to the story about why he had to get to Greenwood, Mississippi that day. He had run out of money, and if I would lend him the price of a ticket he would send it to me as soon as he got to Greenwood. I gave him the money even though I knew I would never see it again. Why? Because this teenager, who was a member of an Assembly of God church in town was so confident that when he brought the man to me I would help him. I simply did not want to disappoint the young boy.

6. Spiritually mature Christians will love in truth.

ILLUSTRATION: In our relationships with others, often what passes for love is little more than a neat business transaction. People are kind to us, so we repay them with equal consideration. When they treat us unjustly, our negative response is really what they asked for. Everything is so balanced, so fair, so logical with this eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth kind of justice. But Christian love never settles for only what's reasonable. It insists on giving mercy as well as justice. It breaks the chain of logical reactions.

General Robert E. Lee was asked what he thought of a fellow officer in the Confederate Army who had made some derogatory remarks about him. Lee rated him as being very satisfactory. The person who asked the question seemed perplexed.

"General," he said, "I guess you don't know what he's been saying about you."

"I know," answered Lee. "But I was asked my opinion of him, not his opinion of me!"

CONCLUSION. *Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. @*

INVITATION.