

Sermon: How We Can Recognize Love

Text: [1 John 3:11-24 ESV](#)

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Introduction: Fruit of the Spirit is how one can determine a real Christian from one who is a fraud. If we are really a part of God through Jesus Christ it will be demonstrated in how we live with each other and how we relate to God. There are never laws against the fruit of the Spirit; and love, in particular, is noticed by the world. Many in our world are looking for *real* love, and Christians are able to demonstrate that spiritual quality better than anyone. [John 13:35 ESV](#) ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The trouble in many circles today is there has been a complete distortion of what love means and how it might be lived out. The kind of love God wants for all of us is about giving, not taking. It is the difference between selfless and selfish.

I remember years ago being at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Chicago for a “Superintendent’s Meeting” with Beatrice Foods. On my way back to the room, a few of us were approached by some ladies who wanted to know if we were wanting any company. We assured them that we did not feel lonely and passed on the offer. We assumed they worked in the hospitality part of the hotel.

Do you know what love is? Well, that is not it. Unless you have come in contact with God and the work of His Spirit in your life, you really don’t know. Love is a trait of a *real* Christian. Before we talk in a positive, biblical way about love, let’s discuss:

I. What Love Is Not

A. Love is a way of living, the world will not appreciate.

[1 John 3:11-15 ESV](#) ¹¹ 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.

The very first example of what happens if God’s love is not in place in a person’s life is found in the story of Cain and Abel. Cain killed his brother, Abel. The verb “to kill” $\sigma\phi\alpha\zeta\epsilon\upsilon\nu$ occurs elsewhere in the NT only in [Revelation](#) (8 times). It implies a violent death. Frequently in the LXX it describes animal sacrifice “to slaughter, butcher, cut the throat;” in [Genesis 22:10](#) it is the verb used for Abraham’s sacrificing his son Isaac. - Brown, p. 441

When Cain killed his brother Abel, this was not roughhousing that got out of hand. This was premeditated murder (fratricide).

Q. What was the problem with Cain? What was the problem with his sacrifice?

A. Cain was evil because of his association (relationship) with the devil. His sacrifice was not pleasing to God because his heart was not right with God.

See Brown, p. 442. Cain illustrates two principles: “The person who acts sinfully belongs to the devil (3:8a), and the devil...was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

Q. Why did Cain murder his brother, Abel?

A. v. 12e - “Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.”

“The thing with hate is that it may end up killing both the object and the source of the hate. Philo points out that Cain really slew, not his brother, but himself.” - Plummer, p.130

Evil hates good because it is good. **John 3:19-20 ESV** ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

Jesus said: **John 15:18-19 ESV** ¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

B. Love is not conditional.

I occasionally have performed wedding ceremonies. I would rather do a funeral than many weddings I could tell you about. But two of my favorite friends from Midland, MI are Kyle and Kathy Jones. I performed their wedding back on July 20, 1996. They went together exclusively from 8th grade through 5 years of college, and in 1996 they were ready to be married. I told them during the ceremony that their union would be for worse, for poorer, and in sickness, yet like most they may have only heard “better, richer and health.” We celebrated their 25th with them and many other friends last year. Real love like God’s love is not conditional on what happens, changes, or how I feel.

Real love says if you put on weight, get old-looking or are crippled in some horrific accident, I will still love you. Teresa and I are 51 years married. I weigh 90 lbs. more than when we met (I was really skinny once), I am now what some people might call elderly, I have cancer, I never was great looking - so why don’t we call it quits? Well, it is because just like many of you - our marriage is perfect!

The real reason is we love each other hopefully like God wants us to - more and more every year. The way we do this is by both of us insisting on always getting our way.

C. Love is not about getting our own way (self-satisfaction).

Some say the opposite of love is hate. Others say hate means you still care, so the real opposite of love is apathy. Maybe another option is that the opposite of love is selfishness. That might be closer.

Harvey Cox put it this way: “The opposite of love is not hatred; it is possessiveness, the deep-set human drive to control and own the other.” I think Harvey may be right. God showed us real love by giving up His Son on the cross so we might live. Jesus gave up everything. In the letter to the Philippian church it literally says Jesus “emptied himself,” taking on the very nature or form of a servant (slave) when He was really a King, so He could demonstrate his love for us. Even on the cross Jesus was asking God’s forgiveness for his persecutors. This passage in Philippians became an early Christian hymn and confession: **Philippians 2:6-11 ESV** ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

D. Love is not just a feeling of enthusiasm.

A word can become cheapened if over used or used in a meaningless way.
I love rock and roll music or I love country music (which makes no sense).
I love (fill in the sport or sports team); I love escargot
I love my job (most days, right?)
I love my dog or I love my cat (again, I don’t understand that one).
I love my 1966 Austin Healey 3000 MKIII
I love Teresa I love attention from Teresa

You see, God commands us to love because love is more than a feeling. Feelings cannot be effectively commanded; actions can.

Worship leaders can tell you to smile/be happy etc. and you might even comply. But just as there is more to being happy than smiling, there is more to love than a feeling.

I remember when David was small and colicky. He had allergies we did not realize he had. Occasionally he would cry at 3:00 a.m. or some such time and Teresa would jump out of bed with a big smile on her face and go attend to our son's needs. It was more than a feeling that got Teresa up from her sound sleep. She loved our son and did what was best for him.

II. What Love Is

“Loving others does not get us to heaven, but it is an indicator that we are on our way there.” -GLW

Our English word for love is a little confusing in that it can be applied to food, cars, animals, ideas and sounds, or people. There are four specific words in Koine Greek for love.

1. *eros* denoted the relationship between male and female, including physical desire, craving and longing.
2. *storge* described affection and was applied especially to the mutual love between family members.
3. *philos* reflected the care and concern that friends have for each other, what we might call brotherly love. Peter spoke of this kind of love when he and Jesus discussed his future task of helping others ([John 21:15-17](#))
4. *agape* describes a unique type of supreme love involving a conscious and deliberate choice to do good for another, a commitment based on the willful choice of the lover, not the qualities of the person receiving the love. Agape love is perhaps best seen in God's love for the world ([John 3:16](#)) and in the love that God calls Christians to display ([I Corinthians 13:1-13](#)). (taken from *The Word in Life Study Bible* ([I John 5:1-3](#)))

When we see the word *agape* used for people who “love” the world and *philos* (*phileo*) for how God loves his son, Jesus, we can see not everything is clear cut. So to make sense out of the use of *agape* for “loving the world,” here is what I have for a workable definition: “Love is being willing to die for your choice and putting all self-interest aside if you are following Jesus i.e., die to self and sin -OR you will die spiritually if Satan is who you are selfishly following.”
- GLW

A. Real love is unconditional - it lasts.

This kind of love depends on nothing; there are no contingencies. It is out of God's never-failing grace that we are loved. It never can be earned. And that is what makes most of us uneasy about our relationship with God.

It is unbelievable that anyone could love us in spite of what we are like, BUT IT IS TRUE! God loves us. And those who have His Spirit will also love us that way.

Illus. As a young boy growing up in Boston, Allan Emery had an experience which made a deep impression upon him. His father received a call saying a well-know Christian had been found at a certain place drunk on the sidewalk. Immediately his father sent his chauffeured limousine to pick the man up, while his mother prepared the best guest room. My friend watched wide-eyed, as the beautiful coverlets were turned down on the exquisite old four-poster bed revealing the monogrammed sheets.

“But mother,” he protested, “he’s drunk. He might even get sick.”

“I know,” his mother kindly replied, “but this man has slipped and fallen. When he comes to, he will be so ashamed. He will need all the loving encouragement we can give him.”

(The Holy Spirit, Billy Graham, pp. 190-91)

Jesus looked at the multitudes and was moved with compassion for them. They were like sheep without a shepherd. John says a shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep.

B. Real love is sacrificial (practical).

1 John 3:16 ESV 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.

Illus. SACRIFICE: Bringing the Light of Hope

In “A Book of Saints,” Anne Gordon tells the story of Father Maximillian Kolbe, who was a prisoner at Auschwitz in August 1941. A prisoner escaped from the camp, and in reprisal, the Nazis ordered that ten prisoners had to die by starvation.

Father Kolbe offered to take the place of one of the condemned men. The Nazis kept Kolbe in the starvation bunker for two weeks and then put him to death by lethal injection on August 14, 1941.

Thirty years later a survivor of Auschwitz described the effect of Kolbe’s action: “It was an enormous shock to the whole camp. We became aware that someone among us in this spiritual dark night of the soul was raising the standard of love on high. Someone unknown, like everyone else, tortured and bereft of name and social standing, went to a horrible death for the sake of someone not even related to him. Therefore it is not true, we cried, that humanity is cast down and trampled in the mud, overcome by oppressors, and overwhelmed by hopelessness. Thousands of prisoners were convinced the true world - God’s world continued to exist and that our torturers would not be able to destroy it.

“To say that Father Kolbe died for us or for that person’s family is too great a simplification. His death was the salvation of thousands... We were stunned by his act, which became for us a mighty explosion of light in the dark camp.” Bill Norman. Leadership - Vol 16, #2

And Jesus even died for the Nazi persecutors...

C. Real love comes from God.

It is a gift that is to be put to use.

It is an example: “And we ought to lay down our lives for *our* brothers.” - v. 16b

In Plummer, p. 128 - “Saint Jerome tells us that during S. John’s last years ‘Little children, love one another’ was the only exhortation which, after he had become too old to preach, he never ceased to give. ‘It is the Lord’s command,’ he said; ‘and if this is done, it is enough.’”

III. What Love Produces

More than just talk about helping others...

A. Love produces action.

I John 3:17 ESV 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?

God’s love cannot be put into words alone. No language could produce complete understanding. Real lovers understand, that is why love is acted out. The drama God produced was on a cross.

Talk about imitating Christ is not enough.

John, the apostle, tells the church: **I John 3:18 ESV** ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Even in the conventional wisdom of Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady* you can hear it: “Don’t talk of love. Show me.”

B. Love produces obedience.

In a time when everyone requires their rights and wants no responsibility, the scriptural union of love and obedience is to some nonsense. Who likes to be told to “submit to one another,” even if it is “out of reverence for Christ” (**Ephesians 5:21**)? But that is what we are asked to do as members of Christ’s Body.

Leroy Lawson put it this way: “By now it should be apparent that anything as demanding, as costly, as exhausting in all its forms as love, requires superhuman strength to sustain it. Only then can love “bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things and never end.” Paul calls it the most excellent way, and it transcends all other “spiritual gifts.”

“Serve one another in love,” Paul writes in [Galatians 5:13-14](#). “The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Obedience produces a close relationship with God. We receive the gift of His Spirit.

I John 3:19-24 ESV ¹⁹ By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; ²⁰ for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Conclusion: Charles Colson quoted Alasdair MacIntyre in *Difficulties in Christian Belief* who wrote: “The *rise of unbelief* in our culture is connected with a “lowering of the quality of Christian life. He goes on by saying: ‘Where the Christian community is incapable of producing lives such as those of the saints, the premises from which it argues will appear rootless and arbitrary. But a Christian community that produces lives of love and beauty is a witness that cannot be denied.’”

We need to be answers to Christ’s prayers in [John 13 and 17](#) where Jesus comments that the world will know we are Christians and will even come to know God when the Church is visibly united in love.

G. K. Chesterton observed that “The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.” Being authentic Christians could improve our communities - even our world. Being a real Christian community, being a community of love will attract attention in even the most jaded culture.