

LOVE ONE ANOTHER, Pt. 3
1 JOHN 4:15-21

Some things that should be self-evident aren't as obvious as we might suppose.

When he was a football coach, Buddy Ryan was known as being a no-nonsense, tough-nosed coach. He learned well from his father, as an article from 1994 recounts:

Leaving Korea as a master sergeant and coming home, “[Buddy] saw a makeshift boxing ring being put up by his father in the backyard among the cottonwood trees. He had seen it often before. When he was growing up, Buddy and his three brothers would fight in elimination rounds to see who would meet their father. He put on the gloves, but he didn't want to hurt his old man. Before Buddy raised his gloves, [his father] stepped on his foot and sucker punched him. He looked down at Buddy and said: ‘Just in case you forget what life's all about.’”

Though he was tremendously successful as a medical doctor and then as the owner of the Los Angeles Lakers, Jerry Buss was a failure as a father. His son Johnny recalls the impact of Jerry's divorce from their mother:

“It left us confused about who our father was. We knew Dad only as the guy who came over on weekends and took us to MacDonald's. I could never understand why he'd want to go to Las Vegas...rather than take us to Disneyland. Even though he provided for us wonderfully, we were starved for the love of a father.”

James Boswell is best known for his biography of the British author and essayist, Samuel Johnson. Boswell apparently spoke often of a particular day in his childhood when his father took him fishing; even in adulthood, he remembered many of the life lessons his father shared with him on that day. One sleuth, having heard often of that day, decided to check Boswell's father's diary for his account of that day — having heard what the day was like from the perspective of the child, how would they day be discussed from the perspective of the parent? Turning to the appropriate day, the man found only a single sentence entered: “Gone fishing today with my son; a day wasted.”

It should be self-evident that one of the things that makes a man a man is his love for his wife and children. But it just isn't that obvious to too many people. And that's why John spends so much time in his first epistle talking about the importance of loving one another. Love is a priority that cannot be emphasized too much either for fathers or church members. We need these repeated reminders. A fundamental priority of the spiritual life is to love one another. In fact...

IF WE KNOW GOD, WE MUST AND WE WILL LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

In this passage, John summarizes what has been said about love in the body of Christ; we find in these verses three foundational principles about biblical love.

1. The ASSURANCE of Faith and Love (vv. 15-16)

- ✓ The right truths must be BELIEVED (vv. 15-16a)
- ✓ The right affection must be PRACTICED (v. 16b)

2. The TRIUMPH of God's Love (vv. 17-19)

- ✓ God's love produces final CONFIDENCE in us (v. 17a, 18)
- ✓ God's love treats us as He treats CHRIST (v. 17b)
- ✓ God's love is the FOUNDATION of our love for others (v. 19)

3. The NECESSITY of Brotherly Love (vv. 20-21)

- ✓ Loving others is antithetical to HATING others in Christ's body (v. 20)
- ✓ Loving others requires INITIATION (v. 21)
- ✓ Loving others requires PERSEVERANCE (v. 21)
- ✓ Loving others requires SELFLESSNESS (v. 21)

1. The ASSURANCE of Faith and Love (vv. 15-16)

- The central theme of the book of 1 John is assurance of salvation — cf. 5:13; 4:13-14.
 - ✓ We know we are saved by the presence and work of the Spirit in our lives (v. 13) and by transformation through the Savior (who saves us from the actions of sin, v. 14).
 - ✓ Two more essentials of assurance are given in vv. 15-16 — to be assured, right truths must be believed
- The right truths must be BELIEVED (vv. 15-16a)
 - ✓ You cannot believe anything and be saved. The most common answer to the questions “Are you a Christian?” and “Why should God let you into Heaven?” is “Oh, I believe in God...”
 - ✓ But John says there is a core belief about Christ that must be *confessed*.
 - Some of you grew up in liturgical churches and you may have recited one of the confessions or creeds of faith on a regular basis. That’s not what John is talking about.
 - When John says, *whoever confesses*, he is talking about a *personal* affirmation of and agreement with a particular truth about Jesus Christ. It means to regard, obey, and submit to Jesus.
 - But even more particularly, it is to affirm something specific about Jesus Christ — that He is *the Son of God*. This is the very truth that the heretics had denied (2:22-23).
 - ... Jesus must be eternal and perfect God to bear the infinite wrath of God.
 - ... Jesus must be man to stand in the place of men as their substitute.
 - ... A denial of either of those truths cannot produce salvation; both must be believed.
 - ... In 16a, John expands this idea and says that this is an expression of *the love God has for us* — salvation is *knowing and believing* (16a) that God has an eternal plan to save us from the penalty and power of our sin through the advent, death, and resurrection of Christ (9-10).
 - ... Notice also that John says *whoever confesses* — that is, anyone can believe, but not all will. But those who do confess and believe will have salvation and assurance.
 - ✓ What is the implication of all this? One cannot deny the essentials of Christ and be saved. There is a core of beliefs that *must* be embraced to be saved from wrath.
 - Christ was the dividing line between heresy and orthodoxy then and he is the same today.
 - Many will embrace and desire God. You can name “God” in a civil setting and be accepted, but name “Christ” and you will be ostracized and persecuted, because He is exclusive and restrictive — and people know that. They want God; they don’t want Jesus. So they don’t have God — only those who confess Christ is fully God and man — redeemer — are God’s.

“Saving faith depends on not just on a general warmth and positive feeling towards Christ, whatever some evangelistic presentations may imply. It depends on a doctrinal confession concerning the person of Christ, on which the whole of our experience of God actually depends.” [Jackman, 127.]

- Theology and doctrinal precision are essential. Believe wrongly and you will die wrongly.
- We live in an age when church leaders will say — “If you must make a choice between heresy and schism, always choose heresy.” So said an Episcopal Bishop who voted to approve the appointment of Gene Robinson as the first openly homosexual bishop in that church. In other words, doctrine isn’t essential; doctrine is optional. But that’s not what John says here. If you don’t believe the truth about Christ you will die in your sins.
- So we must declare the essentials of Christ to unbelievers — “Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell.” (David Platt)
- ✓ It might be that you are like one of the false leaders in the Ephesian church. You might say, “Sure, I like Jesus, He’s cool; He’s ok...” But at the same time you believe *Time* magazine and *Smithsonian* and others who suggest He was a good teacher without being God. If that is true, you are in a hopeless condition.
 - Like all people, you are a sinner who sins and that leaves you deserving God’s wrath.
 - The only way to avoid God’s wrath and to be freed from you propensity to sin is through Christ (2:2). But you can’t believe in just any Jesus. You must believe in the Jesus revealed in the Scriptures — the One who was the infinite and eternal God who took on flesh and manhood so that He was fully God and fully man. This Jesus was sinless and yet He willingly was crucified and He willingly gave up His life to absorb God’s wrath for sin so that you would not have to pay that penalty for sin. And if you believe that *that* Jesus died in your place, you will be freed from God’s judgment and you will be freed from the power of sin so that you no longer have to sin.
- ✓ How do you know you are saved? What do you believe about Jesus? That’s John’s point. But there is more that he says about assurance in v. 16 —
- The right affection must be PRACTICED (v. 16b)
 - ✓ How do you know you are saved? You know you are saved by asking, “What is your life like?”
 - ✓ John says, ***the one who abides in love abides in God...*** In other words, the one who regularly or continually remains one who loves others is giving evidence that he is living with God. His life of love demonstrates that his life is with God.
 - ✓ So if we wonder about our assurance we can simply ask, “am I obediently, regularly loving other believers?” “Is my life conspicuously marked by the love of Christians?” “Do I like to be with other believers and do I demonstrate compassion, grace, kindness, and gentleness to them?”

- ✓ To summarize these verses, we will have assurance if we believe the right things about Christ and if we relate to Christ's people the way Christ relates to them (in love). So love for Christ and love for Christ's people gives assurance.
- ✓ There is a second summary principle about love in this passage —

2. The TRIUMPH of God's Love (vv. 17-19)

- God's love produces final CONFIDENCE in us (v. 17a, 18)
 - ✓ When I was in seminary I cleaned pools to pay my bills. We had a checklist of everything we were supposed to do each time we visited a pool — what readings we were to take and what procedures we were to use — cleaning various filters, scrubbing, netting, vacuuming, etc. One day I went to a pool and looked at the hair and lint trap by the pool motor — it had a clear top that allowed me to see whether or not there was dirt or leaves in the basket. And it was empty. Now procedure said I was supposed to stop the pump, open the lid, pull out the container and empty it (regardless of what I saw). But I saw an opportunity to shave a couple of minutes off my cleaning time, so I didn't follow the procedure, believing my eyes saw correctly. That evening I got a phone call from my boss. "Did you clean the *Jones*' pool today?" "Yes." "Did you clean the hair and lint? Did you actually pull it out and physically check it?" *How did he know? He never called about stuff like that!* And in that instant I made a decision. "Yes, I did," I lied. "Okay. I just needed to check because Mr. Jones called me and said that after you left he checked the hair and lint and found debris in it and I wanted to know what to tell him." Oh-oh. Now what do I do? We hung up, but my conscience gave me no rest. I knew that I would not be able to deal with my boss with a clear conscience unless I told him the truth. So I called him back, confessed, and asked for forgiveness.
 - ✓ My issue that day was that because of my sin I had no confidence in my relationship with my boss. I knew that my lie (that I attempted to justify) had damaged my integrity and standing before him.
 - ✓ In a similar (but much greater) way, the person who does not confess his sin has no confidence with God. He knows that the God who searches all hearts and knows all things can and will condemn him — he has no right or standing to survive in front of God (Rev. 1:17).
 - ✓ But notice something incredible about what the love God has for people does — ***love is perfected*** (matured) ***with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment***. On the day that the books of Heaven are opened and God judges the living and the dead, the one who is loved by God has no reason to fear. He can be ***confident*** — bold and sure. What is his confidence? It's not *self*-confidence. It's a confidence that Christ has atoned for our sin and though we don't deserve forgiveness and freedom from sin, in love He has given us these things.

- ✓ Because of this confidence and God's perfect love, there is ***no fear*** (v. 18).
 - This verse means that because God has loved His children that love has thrown fear out of the life of the believer — He does not pull back from the Father, but He confidently runs to Him.
 - One of my favorite memories from when our children were little was when they would come to the church and I'd hear them from the front door — little feet running, voices calling, "Da—dd—y" and even if my door was closed — here they came! No fear. Just confidence that they can always get in to see their daddy. That's just the way it should be; and that's just the way it also should be with our heavenly Father. We don't fear His judgment and ***punishment*** because we are His. (Aside: if ***someone fears*** it indicates that ***He is not perfected in love*** — i.e., something is dreadfully wrong with his profession because all believers love Christ and are not afraid of Him; 2 Tim. 4:8; Js. 1:12).
- ✓ This also is a theme throughout the letter — cf. 2:28; 3:1-2. All men will stand before God (there *will be* a day of judgment) and all men will either shrink back in shame or will have confidence before the Lord. It is remarkable that a man can have confidence before God (Is. 6), but that is just what God in His love has done for us. This is the triumph and hope of love.
- ✓ But there is also another reality about God's victorious love —
- God's love treats us as He treats CHRIST (v. 17b)
 - ✓ John says that the believer can be confident ***because as He (Christ) is, so we also are in this world.***
 - ✓ In other words, God the Father treats believers in the very same way that He treats His unique Son (***only begotten***, v. 9).
 - We are clothed with Christ's righteousness (Rom. 3:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:21).
 - We are adopted and treated as God's sons (Gal. 4:1-7).
 - We are loved by God (Jn. 14:21; 17:24-26).
 - We are given all the spiritual blessings of Heaven (Eph. 1:3ff).
 - We are given the Spirit who belongs to Christ (Eph. 1:13-14; John 14:16, 26).
 - ✓ And because this is how we are treated, this is also how we should conduct ourselves. If we are loved by God to such an extent that is so lavish in His gifts to us, that's the way we should relate to one another — which is what John says next about God's love...
- God's love is the FOUNDATION of our love for others (v. 19)
 - ✓ How remarkable is it that we love others? John says, "We — *we* — love...", using an emphatic pronoun to demonstrate the incredible truth that we have an ability to love others!
 - ✓ Where did that ability come from? It certainly didn't come from within us.

- ✓ I have a “Breaking News” notification from Fox News sent to my phone. Sometimes the breaking news isn’t so significant — the President traveled to a certain country, or Brazil won its opening World Cup game. But in recent months it has seemed that at least weekly I get a notification that says something like, “Gunman kills three in Oregon school” or “Gunman kills wife and children and self in domestic dispute...” It was shocking when the gunman killed seven people and himself at Wedgewood Baptist Church in 1999. Now it seems like those kinds of killings are weekly and unless the number killed is in double figures, we are barely shocked. *That* is the natural heart of man. It is the heart of man to be selfish and hating, not loving. The natural man is like an infant that if it had ability and accessibility to a gun or knives would kill you for not feeding him.
- ✓ So the fact that *we* love is owing only to one thing — God has ***first loved us***. He initiated love; He gave us love from Himself. He taught us to love. And He gave us the ability to love.

- *John 15:9 “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.*
- *John 15:19 “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.*
- *Rom. 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
- *Eph. 1:5 In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...*

- ✓ If and when we love, it is only because God has made us able to love. His love is foundational to our ability to love. We would not know love or be able to love without that love from Him.
- ✓ This is the triumph and hope of God’s love. And because of that hope, there is also...

3. The NECESSITY of Brotherly Love (vv. 20-21)

- Loving others is antithetical to HATING others in Christ’s body (v. 20)
 - ✓ John says that there is a possibility that there would be some in the church body who say, “***I love God,***” and (yet) ***hates his brother...*** He continually says, “I have a continual, ongoing love for God,” but he also continually hates his brother (he keeps on hating him). So, John says, his (ongoing, present tense) state is that of a liar.
 - ✓ Regardless of his claim to love God, when he hates his brother, he is a liar who does not love God. In fact, it could also be said that if he hates his brother, he also hates God. The pattern here is similar in thought to 2:4.

- ✓ John is particularly clear about those who claim to be believers yet live openly in sin, as he has repeatedly done in the book: 1:10; 2:4; also, 2:16, 19; 3:6, 14; 4:8.
 - ✓ Now few people (at least in the context of the church) would openly acknowledge hating each other; but when we aren't openly, aggressively, intentionally loving each other, then we are in fact, hating each other.
 - ✓ When I went to seminary I visited churches to try to find a new home and in one church (about our size) the pastor was making a point about fellowship and he said, "Some of you haven't spoken to others in this church body for more than 20 years...you sit on opposite sides of the sanctuary so you can avoid each other..." I don't know what happened as a result of that message, but I can tell you what John says about such a situation: those people aren't believers.
 - Scripture often argues from the lesser to the greater; do the small thing and you will do the great thing; if you are unwilling to do the little thing, you will be unwilling to do the larger thing. And that's what John does in v. 20 —
 - ***The one who does not love his brother whom he has seen...*** since we know and see one another and know and see our needs and frailties and know and see the things that make us attractive, it should be expected that we would love each other.
 - But if one doesn't love when he can see (the lesser thing), then he ***cannot*** (he has no ability) ***to love God whom he has not seen*** (the greater thing). It is impossible to hate your brother and at the same to love God. If you hate your brother you are a hater of God.
 - ✓ What does this hatred look like? John doesn't say here. In fact, in most of the book, he's pretty indefinite about what love looks like — except in **3:17**. To hate our brother means that we are apathetic about relationships in the body. We are content to live independently and alone. "We don't need others and they don't need us," we reason. "I'll take care of myself and they can take care of themselves." And that will destroy fellowship and unity in the church and will damage our testimony to the world.
 - ✓ The American way is to live independently. We wrote the book on independence. But to live the biblical way is to live dependently and lovingly with each other.
 - ✓ How can we do that? John alludes to several ways in the final verse:
- Loving others requires INITIATION (v. 21)
 - ✓ This is the summary verse of this entire section. John reminds us that this is a ***commandment*** that came from Christ — so it is not optional. It is necessary to our spiritual lives.
 - ✓ ***The one who loves God should love his brother also.*** Do you love God? Then love your brother in Christ.
 - ✓ And one thing that means is that you do not look around waiting for people to love you. But you initiate love with others. Very little will destroy a marriage faster than one person saying,

“love me, take care of me, serve me, help me...” The me monster is opposed to loving service.

- ✓ Do you want this to be a loving body that is known in this community for the remarkable way that we take care of each other? Then initiate that loving care of others regardless of what they do for you.
 - But you don’t know my needs. You don’t know my situation. I was never loved by anyone; you don’t know how mean people are to me. Yes. That could probably be said in some form by everyone, but the pattern for our love is God who *first* loved us (v. 19); we did not love Him. In fact, we were His enemies. But He initiated love for us. And that is what we do for others.
 - Take time to look around you this week. Who are the people in this body that you repeatedly run into? Who is missing? Who do you see that has a particular need? Who is alone? Who is weak? What can you do to love that person and serve him?

- Loving others requires PERSEVERANCE (v. 21)

- ✓ One wag has said, “In any marriage more than seven days old there are grounds for divorce; the key is to find — and keep finding — grounds for marriage.”
- ✓ That’s similar to the situation in the church. We can love once; but can we keep loving?
- ✓ Some have wondered why it is sometimes harder to love in the church body than in the world. Well, in the world, if we don’t like someone, we create a structure to avoid him. If we don’t like the New York Yankees, then we will not go to Yankee games and only go to Ranger games. If we don’t like Jeeps, then we won’t join the Lone Star Jeep Club. If we don’t like minorities, then you won’t go to the inner city. But if you are a believer, you don’t get to make those distinctions: God puts us together with all kinds of people with whom we would not ordinarily associate and says, “love each other” (e.g., Eph. 2:11-22).
- ✓ So loving each other in the church is hard because we can’t (or shouldn’t) get away from each other. But loving each other in the church is also an opportunity for us to say, “I will persist in loving you because God has persisted in loving me, though I am by nature unlovely and unlovable. So when you also are hard to love, I will keep loving you because that’s the way God has loved me.”

- Loving others requires SELFLESSNESS (v. 21)

- ✓ The one dominant theme about God’s love in this book is on the sacrificial nature of love.
- ✓ Particularly John keeps coming back to the selfless and sacrificial love of Christ and the Father (e.g., vv. 9-10). The central heart attitude of love is willingness to sacrifice for the other regardless of the cost to ourselves.
- ✓ That’s the kind of love that makes a marriage (Eph. 5:25ff) and church flourish.

- Love in the church body is not optional. Because we have been loved by God, loving other believers in the church body is essential.

CONCLUSION: What is the impact of a church that loves this way? How about the impact of a father who loves this way? John Paton was a missionary to the Hebrides (19th C.). Late in life he recounted the 40-mile walk he took when in his early 20s to go from his home to the train station where he would find transportation to go to seminary to prepare him for the mission field:

My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence - my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me; and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain! We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil!"

Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him - gazing after me. Waving my hat in adieu, I rounded the corner and out of sight in instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dike to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dike and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while he got down, set his face toward home, and began to return - his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as he had given me. (pp. 25-26)

The impact of a father who loves well is the delight of his children to love the God he loves. And when a church member loves well, it also produces love for Christ throughout the church body and a testimony to the world of what Christ can do to change them.