

Love Does Not Hate

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[0 : 0 0] Now would you turn back with me to 1 John on page 127 of the Pew Bible and the section that we're looking at this evening and the young people will be looking at later on is entitled Love One Another.

And you know it's really difficult to preach a sermon on loving one another and saying things that haven't been said before. I'm sure every one of us here could get up and preach a sermon on loving one another.

But nonetheless I think and I hope we'll find that God will speak to us and challenges again from this. I wonder if you sometimes, I'm going to have to do something about my eyes sorry, I can't work out where I'm going.

I hope that sometimes in your life, I can't see you properly, I have to go to the optician swallow my pride again.

If in your Christian life you feel inferior, one of you should go from day to day as a Christian you feel an inferior Christian, a lesser Christian than other people and maybe coming to church makes that even more highlighted in your life.

[1 : 2 4] You look at your own life and you think well I'm a rubbish Christian and everyone else in church seems to be really great Christians and seems to have it all together and maybe you have certain standards by which you judge both yourself and maybe other Christians and if I asked you to shout out tonight the kind of things that you would use to characterise a good Christian I'm sure some of the things would be the same but I'm sure some of the things would be different.

Someone who is really strong on their Bible knowledge, great biblical person, that's a great Christian, I'm not like that. Someone with great faith, a person who has got such great faith and I can't share that, I don't have that faith or a great evangelist, these people are tremendous at sharing their faith and telling other people about it, I don't feel like that, I'm inferior.

Otherworldly, kind of really that sense of holiness about them that you don't feel you have. Maybe you judge others about how the kind of standard by which you think they live their Christian lives and you measure people just as we measure ourselves about the kind of Christians we think we are, maybe you measure others and say the same.

Maybe you look at someone and spend a little bit of time and say I think they are really struggling, they are not a great Christian, I haven't seen them at the prayer meeting, they don't talk much about Jesus with me, I'm not sure, I think they may be struggling quite a bit as a Christian and so we make judgements, some of them may be accurate, some of them may not be accurate.

But to the people that John was writing, he was writing as you've heard over the last number of weeks into a specific situation where their faith, their Christian, what made a Christian or what is the standard and the reality of being a Christian was being challenged by false teachers and we don't know that much about what the false teachers were teaching but we know roughly that they were, some of them were at least saying well look it doesn't really matter how you live, it doesn't matter if you obey God or not, that's for the Old Testament.

[3 : 30] It just matters about how you feel and having this knowledge, some kind of mystic knowledge of a relationship with God and therefore other people don't matter that much either, how you treat other people, other Christians don't matter, church doesn't matter that much, as long as you have this kind of mystic relationship with God, the superior knowledge that you have because of your relationship with him.

That's kind of a very rough summary of the kind of things that maybe were being taught in relation to their faith and who Jesus was and they didn't really believe that Jesus was God and that Jesus had come to die in the way that the Bible teaches.

There was a superiority I guess about them. I'm asking the opposite question, I'm asking about feeling inferior and it may be that you feel inferior because you feel other people are superior Christians because they've got great knowledge or because they have great insight.

Can I just, just to kind of set the scene in an unrelated way at one level and I'm not going to go back to this, but just to ruffle your feathers as it were, if you think like that, to read a couple of verses from Matthew's Gospel, from Matthew chapter 7 to begin with, Matthew chapter 7 and at verse 21.

I'm just ruffling your feathers because this is what Jesus did when people thought very highly of themselves and their gifts and what they were doing and Jesus said, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, we'll enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who's now.

[5 : 20] Many will say to me in that day, listen to this, listen to this, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? In your name, drive out demons and perform many miracles. That's a great Christian, isn't it?

A miracle worker, someone who performs great miracles, drives out demons. Then I will tell you plainly, I never knew you away from me, you evildoers.

Okay, so Jesus' standards may be different from what we think. The people around Jesus were thinking, miracle workers, exorcists, prophets, these were the great people.

Jesus was saying, well, that's not by my standard. And in Matthew 10 and verse 42, if you follow on just a little bit further, Jesus says, and if anyone in verse 42 gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly lose his reward.

So a cup of cold water, the sovereign God who we saw this morning is the I am God, the Yahweh God, the God who is existent, who is above and beyond everything.

[6 : 31] He notices a cup of cold water that we give to a fellow Christian. Thanks Philip. Philip came with a cup of cold water to me. That wasn't staged.

It wasn't staged. I did drink it all. But there we go. He will get his reward in heaven for that act. That's a great Christian. So there we have that.

But so you may be someone who struggles with assurance about the kind of Christian you are. I'm really a Christian. You feel inferior. And around you you may feel as better than you and you judge yourself maybe by a standard that isn't God's standard.

So I just want to look at this passage for a little while this evening and see what the Holy Spirit has to say through John about genuine Christianity.

Because remember that was what was at stake here in the letter that he was writing. It was genuine, your Christianity in mind was at stake by the false teaching.

[7 : 35] What is a Christian then? Well, this is not an exhaustive study of what a Christian is because the Bible says a lot about what a Christian is. But nonetheless it's very crucial. It's very basic.

And how do we know it's very basic? Because John says here, this is the message you've heard from the beginning. So from the very beginning this has been the message that is very important.

The message which really goes back to the previous verse, anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God. Not as anyone who does not love his brother.

So love is fellow Christian. This is the message you've heard from the beginning. So really what is the message that is from the beginning of really revelation and the Christian gospel could be summarised like this.

People, especially Christians, matter to you because they matter to Christ. Okay, that's the definition that comes out of this passage for what is a Christian.

[8 : 38] What is important for a Christian to be. A Christian is someone for whom people, especially other Christians, matter to you because they matter to Christ.

Or it is people that you love, other Christians that you love, particularly because Jesus loves them too. So that is really what is very important.

That's the litmus test of greatness in the kingdom. That is what genuine Christianity is. It is this recognition of loving fellow Christians because one Christ loves us and because Christ loves them.

Loving fellow Christians and it is very much loving Christians in an active way. It is not a passive thing. It is not just something that we say, oh yeah, I love everyone.

It is wonderful. But it is a very active Christian love that we will go on to see. That is absolutely what greatness is.

[9 : 44] But can I say something else that is related to that that sometimes we forget. And not only is it that we love one another or it is exactly that.

Is that we love one another. Now that doesn't only mean we love other Christians. It means we allow ourselves to be loved by other Christians.

Now that's different, isn't it? And that's a challenge to our independence and it's a challenge to our living for ourselves. It means that we need to be humble enough not just to be loving others which many of us can do.

It is sometimes easier to give than to receive. Sometimes we find it very hard to receive for example a gift that we don't deserve. Oh no, I don't deserve that.

Please don't do that. I will pay you back. I promise I will pay you back. Because we find it hard to receive something we haven't deserved. It is sometimes hard for us to receive love and to be vulnerable and to be the recipient of love in a community as much as it is to give.

[10 : 48] It's very hard for leaders to do that. Leaders feel they need to be macho and independent and strong and always be giving. But it's very important for leaders to be exemplifying not only that we give out love but also that we will receive love and that we will receive help and support and encouragement in our lives.

So that is the crucial teaching of this passage, we should love one another. You're an inferior Christian because you can't move mountains and you don't have a great faith.

Your knowledge is suspect. You don't know what book of the Bible comes after Ezra. You're not great at evangelism.

You kind of balk at opportunities to share your faith and you think that's another opportunity missed. You feel that you're not as holy as you should be.

And so you feel an inferior Christian in church and so much so that sometimes you feel so inferior you don't come because it makes you feel so bad. But the reality is if your foundation is wrong, if your foundation of understanding what is important to God is wrong then your whole building will be wrong and your whole Christian life will be wrong.

[12 : 14] You will be a dysfunctional Christian. If you think evangelism or knowledge or faith is the most important aspect of your Christian life then your whole Christian life will be dysfunctional and you will find it easy to judge other people and you will find it difficult to be humble.

Love one another. That is what is the message that has been from the beginning of the Christian life. So have the Beatles got it right?

All you need is love. Is that the kind of soft, sentimental message that I'm bringing you this evening? All you need is love. Isn't that just what the world believes? We just really need to love one another and you don't need to be involved in church to believe that and to accept that.

Isn't that the way of the world? That we just are to love one another or isn't it just a way of all religions? So whether you're a Buddhist or Islamic or whatever it might be that's the kind of central basic message that we all share that we love one another.

That might be the case at a worldly level but it's all about definitions and that's what I want to break down a little bit this evening about the definition of what it means.

[13 : 30] It sounds very simple and gentle and nice. You know, well we just love one another and we should love one another and that's absolutely right but what about the definitions? Is it just like the Beatles?

Is it that kind of wishful, emotional, romanticism of all smiling and loving one another? Well it's not the same necessarily as the worldly love that might be espoused in most of our popular music because it's not to be love like Cain's love.

Okay then see the next verse. Do not be like Cain who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. Now do you think for a moment Cain didn't love? Do you think Cain was the epitome of evil and satanic kind of outworking?

No. Cain was an ordinary bloke. He was Abel's brother. They grew up together. He was married. He had children. He probably had a job. I'm sure Cain loved perfectly well at a human level.

But what the scripture exposed in Cain was that he didn't love God and because he didn't love God he loved himself first.

[14 : 48] He had a great self-love and that self-love drove his envy and his resentment both of God and of his brother. And so while he I'm sure undoubtedly loved as a husband and as a father it wasn't the love that is saving love nor was it the love that has God at its heart.

It wasn't a love that was motivated by God nor was it a love for God or for his glory. It was an abused love and it was a picture of the abused love that is so often the reality of love in our world without Christ is a self-motivated, self-centered love that looks to protect and looks to glorify ourselves rather than the living God.

It was a love that didn't recognize the truth of his own heart because he gave a cheap sacrifice to his Father in heaven whereas Abel recognized the value of his first fruits being given to a redeeming God.

So what kind of love is it then that we are asked to live in our Christian lives? And the challenge is for us to think about that this evening as believers, as Christians that we think about what is the kind of love?

Well it's explained in verse 16. This is how we know what love is. Christ Jesus laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. The gospel is very simple but it's very profound and I'm saying nothing new tonight and you'll have heard this all before a hundred times.

[16 : 22] It is the love of God that is the model for our love. More than just a model it's the love that redeems us but it's therefore it's personal, it's real we saw this morning the kind of God we have, a sovereign God but a personal God, it's active, it's gutsy, it's true and it's pure.

There's two aspects just here, many other aspects to this love. There's two aspects that are really highlighted here. One is a redeeming love, okay? This is how we know Christ Jesus laid down his life for us.

There was a purpose to his love. It was his love is to redeem us, to rescue us and therefore it's a muscle bound love because it achieved something.

It wasn't just nice statements, it wasn't just he said from heaven, I really love you but it was a love that redeemed and took us, rescued us from a bad situation.

Sometimes when you're preparing sermons you kind of, when you're preparing two sermons for one weekend the problem is sometimes you hear the same things twice because I think when I'm doing one sermon, oh that's really great and I forget I've prepared it already for the morning sermons if you heard it in the morning.

[17 : 42] So when I was writing this I thought about, I had in brackets for an example, child in danger. This morning I used the illustration of taking the film, see, your mind works, not many examples, not many fresh things but it's that whole thing isn't it?

Of a father who has come to rescue us, you came to get me. You came and he's taken us from death to life.

He's chosen to, he's willed to because of his love because of his character and he's not done it because he's motivated by our worthiness. He didn't look at us and choose someone, they're really worthy to be rescued.

I'll choose him, he did it simply because he has redeeming love. He sees through what we are and as believers we have come to that place, we've come to that place where we see through the deception of our own self-love.

I'm not saying we don't battle against it but we see through that deception of our self-love and the idolatry that it goes with it and we know that he's come to redeem to rescue us.

[18 : 52] It's a self-redeeming love and it's also obviously a self-sacrificial love, the same thing that he laid down his life at its cost, isn't it? So the love that is described that we are asked to understand and know is both redeeming and by very nature I guess redeeming is self-sacrificial.

You know about the cross and we often go simply to the cross and that's absolutely right because there can be nothing more self-sacrificial than that but I think sometimes you know the cross so well that you just, and I just kind of brush over it, oh yes, the cross.

But we remember from the moment of his incarnation he was denying himself on our behalf, it was a self-sacrificial love. You know right from the moment he would go without sleep, he would obey his parents, he lived in a community, he worked in that community, he made wooden things in that community for them and when he had his disciples he taught them patiently and slowly and he bit his tongue, he was forgiving with them, he rejected the opportunities to become a king and a throne and he washed his disciples feet and he fed people and he had the children sitting on his knee and then he drank the dregs of the cup of death and hell to its bitter dregs.

So it's a self-sacrificial love. That's the kind of love it is. So we find therefore as believers in our lives this evening, not just in word only but in our lives we find an obligation, a very uncomfortable word to use in a Christian church which magnifies and praises grace and goodness and faith that is a free gift but we know his love obligates look at the second half of that verse 16 and we ought, that's an obligation word, we ought, it's an ought, it's a strong, strong word, we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers, for our fellow Christians, it's an obligating love, do you see that?

It's not, and because of what Jesus said, be really nice, be great if once in a while you could, maybe you could consider, I wonder if we could discuss this together and have a symposium but no he says you ought, it's not mine, it's mine this morning, excellent, excellent.

[21 : 47] It's okay, I did it this morning, happens to the best of us. His love, okay it obligates us, can you see that, it's an obligation you ought to love, not you might when they are worthy of your love, when they're really super and things are going swimmingly, he says you ought to love our fellow Christian.

Chapter 1 and verse 7, we're told in the same letter, if you walk in the light of Christ, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin, so we ought to love one another because we're in fellowship with one another and that can be for us a very uncomfortable truth, it can be a very challenging truth because his love disrupts us into the light, I'm using a kind of strong, try to use a strong picture, we talk about coming to Christ and often we think about coming to Christ and being in Christ is quite a gentle and a peaceful thing but the reality is that he takes us from darkness to light, very strong, John's full of these real extremes from life to death, light to darkness or darkness to light and he disrupts us into the light and that can be uncomfortable for us because by nature we prefer the darkness, he's exposing sometimes our sinful selfishness and our comfort and he infuses us with spiritual adrenaline and joy, it's important to recognize and see who he is because our heart, as we said this morning, wants what it wants and yet he asks us to have a heart that wants what he wants and that is that we love in the same way that he is loved us, so that means, it means a lot more, the same two things just as we closed, it means our love to one another, okay let's move away from the academic here, let's move into the love you have your city group, the love that you have in a church, the people beside you, the love in this congregation or if you're a visitor tonight in your own congregation, your own gospel community, what is the kind of love that Jesus expects us to live with and to show to one another and to receive from one another, it's not just giving, it's receiving and that's great, so it's the same two things, it's a redeeming love and it's a self-sacrificial love, so the kind of love we have for one another isn't a love that is attracted simply to other people because they're nice, so that you'll go to the same kind of people in church every day because they're nice people, because the people you love, they're like you, you're kind of looking in a mirror in reality, but it's redeeming love, our motive in loving other Christians becomes primarily other Christians is to rescue them, not in an ultimate way because Christ has done that, he's rescued them, but in a day to day, in other words when we see our fellow Christians in need, we don't walk away from them, you know the way of the world says a friend in need is a pain in the neck, but Christians say a friend in need is exactly the kind of friend that Christ has brought us into this world to help, you see if anyone verse 17 is material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be an endeared children, let us not love with words or tongue with lovely songs or with a great testimony, but in word and indeed this is then how we know we belong to the truth, this is the mark of greatness, this will give us the assurance we need that we're Christians, when we are loving like Christ with a redeeming love, that every day the people around us, the people in the pews, and we don't see it in the pews,

you don't see it in the pews, we'll dress up for church, we don't see it there, we don't see it with one another, we see it when we know one another and when we're involved in one another's lives and when we recognize sometimes the emotional or the practical or the spiritual or the relational needs that people have and in our sinful self-centeredness we say I'm not interested, I've got my life to live, I will follow Jesus on the top of Arthur's seat because that's what I'm closest to him, but don't give me other people and their needs and their problems, but can you not see, can we not see when we do that, we are denying the kind of grace that has been poured out onto us, where God didn't say I'll stay on the top of Arthur's seat or in the throne room of the kingdom, but I left there because you needed me to save you and that is the gospel that we have, we overcome the inconvenience of people, people are so inconvenient aren't they, it's like teachers always say school would be great, my job would be great if there was no kids and they don't always see that, so teachers are wonderful and they love kids, they love kids, but if

I was a teacher that's what I would say and you know it's like that in a church sometimes we can think that, a church would be great if it wasn't for people and all their problems and difficulties, I just want to have that great emotional feeling and that deep sense of his wonderful, pure presence, don't bother me with people and their issues, we like sometimes the safety of our individual coffins, our spiritual coffins, so it's redeeming love, it's love that knows and that cares and that makes time and it's tough, it's tough love, it really is, but it's also at the same level, it's very self-sacrificial, so we choose to love others, not because they're necessarily lovable, they might be lovable, we don't just choose people who are not lovable, but that's not the motive behind why we love them, we love them not in response to them deserving that, we love them because we've chosen to self-sacrificially serve them, it's not about attractiveness, it's not about what we will get in return, we love people because we know next week they'll love us back and they'll love us even better, it's not easy very often to love with the love of Christ because there will be times when it will be hugely blessed and hugely rewarding for us, but there will also be times when we'll be misunderstood because that was true of Jesus, wasn't it, when we'll be unappreciated and people will walk away and all we will see is their back, that's all we'll see, there'll be no appreciation, it will not do it for praise, we'll do it and it will be ill-advised, we'll be advised by wise and well-meaning sages that this isn't the way to go and it will cost a great deal physically and a great deal spiritually, but it's moving beyond Christian punditry about talking a good Christian game, you know these guys that come out on this Friday, Saturday night at the football, or some of them I guess, our ex-footballer so they would have played, but some of them aren't and they talk a great game and they almost know better and they always know exactly where the ball should have gone and how it should have been passed, it's moving beyond that to actually action, you know, dear children, let us not love verse 18 with words or tongue but with actions and truth and that's such an encouragement to us and I think within that is the encouragement to accept love as well, to admit vulnerability, to admit times when you say well I need that support, I need that spiritual strength from others, I need their help, I can't do it on my own, sometimes that's material things, sometimes it's relational, many different things and that is the kind of love that is spoken of here and really the last section,

I haven't got time to go into that last section but that last section is all about knowing, having Christian assurance, people talk about a lack of assurance, lack knowing, you know, thinking they're terrible, they don't have what other people have, well he says you look at your hearts, you know, you have confidence and you can be powerful in prayer and you can have what you ask because you obey because he speaks in the previous section about righteousness and about obedience and because you love one another as he, it's a command, he commanded us and that when we love one another and love him and obey him, we know that it's his spirit that helps us do that, nobody can do that unless they are born again, unless they are born in you of the spirit, this spirit of God that enables us to love God and to love one another so when you look at other Christians and they are great faith and they are wonderful testimonies and they can do miracles, they can move mountains, don't be discouraged, thank

[32 : 02] God for them and thank God for what they have and just remember that God in that last day will be asking how many cups of cold water you gave and that really is what is greatness in the kingdom that we love one another, nobody else might know about it but that we live that and every one of us could do this, another great thing, we can simply live that way because that's his way, people matter to us because people matter to Christ and that is the mark of greatness when people matter, people especially of the household of faith matter to us and that's a mark of our truly understanding what it is to be a Christian and I hope that we can be encouraged by that, I hope we are challenged by that, I am certainly challenged by that hugely and that we will seek to do what we can do as a community together because Christ died for us, we have that great thing in common and that we have this great binding gel that enables us to move forward together because of what Jesus has done and may we do that, may we forgive one another, may we be compassionate to one another, may we be slow to anger, may we not gossip about one another, when we see one another's need, may we not sigh and it turn away but may we find the strength from the Holy Spirit and God to provide for that need, however gentle or however undramatic it is and no God's blessing in so doing,

God's power heads in prayer, Father God help us we pray, help us to be united, not all the same but united, united in Christ and as any good family ought to be, may we be able to care for one another, look after one another and we know that that can never come from simply our attendance at church, we know that as we strive here to build a gospel community particularly through our city groups and through the fellowship and friendship and prayer that we share together but also in many other ways we think of identity and the young people and how that they are bonding and friendship together and we hope and pray that that will be friendship that will last right through their lives, that they will love one another and serve one another, help one another and that they will respond to one another in times of need and what we pray for them we pray for ourselves and we ask that we would seek by your grace, your help to do this, we know it's not a self help manual, we know we need your grace, we know we need your forgiveness and we need your strength, we know you love us, we know you want us to have these things, you will pour out your spirit on us and we thank you that you are not miserly, you are not going to give us just a tiny little bit but you will pour out your spirit and provide for us in our need so we thank you for these things, bless them to us and bless your truth in Jesus name, amen.