

Lesson 16: “Loving InDeed”

1 John 3:16-18

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1 John 3:16-18 *We know love by this, that He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees 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 in truth.*

Here is a Scripture that really needs no commentary. You read this and know right away what God is saying to you. My message today will only amplify and underline what you already know to be true.

✓ In verse 16 we have the STANDARD of love: Jesus laid down His life for us. And our obvious response: to give our lives for others.

✓ In verse 17 we have the TEST of love: If we have the means to help another, will we or won't we?

✓ In verse 18 we have the PRINCIPLE of love: Love is not what you say, or feel, but what you DO for another. It is love in action, or “Love InDeed,” which is the title of my message today.

There is an old chorus that goes like this: *(singing it)*

Love is something that's real

Love is something that's true

Love is something you feel

But most of all, love is something you do

Or like the old phrase that we all learned as children: *“actions speak louder than words.”*

James, the earthly brother of Jesus, said it in this practical way:

James 2:14-17 *What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”*

Faith, or love which is the expression of that faith, means nothing says James, if a fellow believer has a physical need that is not met by those who have the means to assist.

Let us take each of today's three verses in turn and see how we can amplify the obvious to spur each of us into greater love expressed in action.

THE STANDARD OF LOVE – verse 16

It is Jesus of course who is our standard of loving in deed. God our Father, through the pen of the apostle John, tells us that *“we know love by this”* – that Jesus *“laid down His life for us.”* That happened in A.D. 33 when Jesus willingly was crucified on the cross of Calvary to take our sin upon Himself, that He might pay the price for our forgiveness and redemption. Jesus said it this way:

John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*

The emphasis here is on the word “good.” Any run of the mill, ordinary shepherd will care for his sheep in general. But only the good shepherd – the godly one – will go out of his way to lay down his life for them.

Paul said it this way:

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Paul underlines this amazing sacrifice of love, noting that it was given *“while we were yet sinners.”* We didn't even know it was happening. And if we had known, we wouldn't have cared or taken notice. Jesus didn't give His life for a bunch of righteous friends, but for a bunch of rebellious scallywags. This should speak to us, in that our love expressed to others in need should not depend on our opinion of their moral or spiritual state. Just as Jesus died for sinners, we must give our life to any in need.

And this word “any” is important. It is one thing to want to help “the world” or “all” in need. That is a noble thought, but not a practical one. Rather we must help the one, or the “any”, who we see in need.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

That takes us to Jesus' story of "The Good Samaritan" in Luke, chapter 10. You will remember that the victim in the story was just "a man" – not designated as good, bad, rich or poor. It could be anyone in need. This victim was robbed, stripped and beaten, left half dead on the side of the road. (Luke 10:30)

Both a Pharisee and Levite pass by in turn. These were both religious men who would have fully believed in "loving your neighbor" and caring for those in need. They saw the man and the need, yet they both avoided the man, surely with some excuse of not having time to stop, or this not being their problem.

Jesus continues the story with a Samaritan passing by, seeing the man and having compassion. But more than just having compassion, he put "legs" to the compassion and met the need with sacrifice of time and expense to himself.

Remember too that a Samaritan was a "half-breed" – from one parent who was a Jew and another who was not a Jew – and therefore hated by the religious Jewish elite. That it was a Samaritan who was the godly one in the story would have rubbed stinging salt of guilt into the Jews who heard the story.

Jesus' final words to his listeners were, "*go and do the same.*" Meet a need as you are able. Be the godly one who doesn't pass by disinterested or indifferent. Be the one willing to sacrifice and be inconvenienced for the sake of sharing God's love.

FOR THE BRETHREN

Yes, we are to "love our neighbor as ourselves" and that should be believer or non-believer. But note in 1 John 3:16 that the admonition to "*lay down our lives*" is particularly "*for the brethren*" – meaning for our fellow Christian believers. In the following verse 17 it is the "brother" in need that is reiterated. So this sacrificial love is particularly to be directed to our fellow Christians. This is consistent with Paul's teaching to the Galatians:

Galatians 6:10 *So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Jesus also emphasized the importance of love for fellow believers in His using "one another." Notice "one another" three times in this passage:

John 13:34-35 *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

THE TEST OF LOVE – verse 17

Note the test is for the Christian who "*has the world's goods.*" Is that you? You may not be rich or have a lot of "stuff," but compared to one in physical need you might well have the "goods" that one would need. So having the ability to help is the first step. The second is seeing the need. Remember the Pharisee and Levite in the Good Samaritan story saw the man in need, but passed by. That was their sin. We must never close our eyes to a real need.

You might rightly say you aren't aware of a need. That is why our church has a benevolence fund. Your leaders try to keep abreast of the physical needs of your fellow believers in this church, and try to meet the needs as we see them. Your generous and sacrificial gifts to this fund allow your leadership to help those who determine to be truly in need of assistance. Through the years we have thereby helped many with thousands of dollars of aid. This is just a gentle but sincere "plug" to give to our benevolence fund as you are able.

But, giving to a fund does not absolve us of our responsibility to personally help a needy brother or sister who comes across our path. And the assistance needed may not be financial – but just some time to lend a helping hand. Two such needs come readily to mind. July 4 our brothers need assistance in setting up and tearing down our God and Country ministry at the Camino Real Marketplace. Check out the details in the bulletin. And on the Saturday following, July 6, our family of the Spalingers need help in moving into their new home in north Goleta. If you are able to assist, let them know! And needs like these are ever before us. You can't meet every need. But as Galatians 6:10 says, "while we have opportunity, let us do good."

Be open. Be available. I guarantee God will bless. And as you give of your time, energy and resources, God promises to repay and reward many times over. It is also to the Galatians that Paul wrote:

Galatians 6:7 *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*

And in context, this not only speaks of financial giving, but of physical and emotional aid. Give and be blessed!

That is the third step in the test. (1) is having the “stuff” to meet a need – the time, energy or resources. (2) is seeing and identifying a need. And (3) is actually helping to meet that need. Failing the test is to have the means, see the need, and then “close the heart” to meet the need. Passing the test is to “*lay down our life*” to meet the need. John says this is something we “ought” to do. It is God’s will for his children.

THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE – verse 18

Once again the aged apostle John addresses his audience as “little children.” Again, this translates literally as “young born-again ones.” He is appealing to the truth that we have a new life and new standing as God’s precious heirs of all that is His, in asking, yes commanding, us to love on another in deed.

Having given the ultimate example of Jesus laying His life down on the cross, and having given the test of whether we will see and meet a need that comes our way, John then lays down the general principle in words we can easily remember: “*Let us not love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth.*”

We are NOT to love with (only) word or tongue. And we ARE to love in deed and truth. Notice these statements are parallel, meaning that “word” is in opposition to “deed” and “tongue” is in opposition to “truth.”

The “word” is in opposition to “deed” in that to love only with word, but not in deed is not “agape” love at all. Remember our little chorus: “most of all, love is something you do.” I think we have already made it clear that our love must be in action, not just in word alone.

But of particular interest is the contrast between “tongue” and “truth.” We might easily think that “in tongue” is just another way to say “in word.” But if we are to love in truth – that is, honestly meeting a need “indeed,” then not to love in truth is to love in falsehood, or with “forked tongue” as goes the expression. So I believe the intended meaning is that we are not to love merely in word, that is saying it only, or with “forked tongue”, meaning with no intention whatsoever to meet the need. James tells us it is with “forked tongue” that we would say “be warm and be filled” when we have no intention of meeting that need.

SUMMARY

The Standard of Love – Jesus sacrificially dying on the cross for us

The Test of Love – will we see the need with compassion, use our resources and meet the need?

The Principle of Love - not in word only or with lying tongue, but in action and truthful execution

Our General Target – anyone in need who comes across our path

Our Specific Target - any fellow believer in need who comes across our path

And remember – you cannot love this way in and of yourselves. You must rely on the love of the Holy Spirit within you to give you the compassion and the motivation to love in this way.

Now go and do it! Agape love is something you DO!