



1 JOHN

LOVE DOES

1 JOHN 3:16-18

MAIN IDEA

Like metal toward a magnet, the Christian's soul seeks after God. Christians love because God first loved them (1 John 4:19). God's love doesn't only compel Christians to love God but also to love those around them.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

- **What are some answers people might give if asked, "Where does love come from?" Where would you say love comes from?**
- **How do we know if someone truly loves another? How can we tell the difference between divine, sacrificial love and self-serving love?**

Biblical love isn't self-seeking, but selfless. If a woman marries a man for his money, then the marriage is not based on love but on covetousness and greed. It is easy for us to look down on someone who would act in such a way, yet, if we examine our own motives carefully, we may find that we treat God in much the same way.

The famous Puritan, Thomas Watson, once wrote, "Many love God because he gives them corn and wine, and not for his intrinsic excellencies. We must love God more for what he is, than for what he bestows."¹

Those who love God with the kind of love God Himself has shown toward His children do so because of who He is, not because of the gifts that He might give to them. To show love through gifts and expect love in return is not divine love according to the Bible. That is more akin to manipulation than love.

This principle extends to our neighbors as well. Not only will true Christians love God selflessly, but they will also love their neighbors sacrificially. The blueprint for sacrificial love is found in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. God the Son, Jesus Christ, was both the expression of God's love for His people and the explanation of how God's people ought to love one another. Let's look carefully at John's command to believers: "let us not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth."

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> *Have someone in your group read 1 John 3:16-17.*

Christians are enabled to do the good work of loving others only because they have been made alive in Christ. The gospel not only saves people, but it also frees them to do good works for God's glory. One of the most important and fundamental good works Christians do is loving their neighbor, especially those who are of "the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). It is important to understand what true godly love is like.

- **What illustration did John use to describe brotherly love in verse 17?**

One of the most common ways to love another person is by meeting physical needs. But meeting a physical need takes selfless sacrifice. It may require you to spend money or use precious time and energy. This is what makes the gesture truly loving and Christlike. Christian love is self-sacrificing.

In John 15:12, Jesus told His disciples that they should “Love one another as I have loved you.” How did Christ love His disciples? He gave His life as a ransom for many. He became poor so that they might become rich. He went to His death so that they could find life!

- **What did John say in verse 16 about the depth of love Christians ought to show one another? How does this stand out compared to the world’s view of love? How does Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross help Christians understand what it means to love others?**

Jesus said, “No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). When Jesus said those words, He was speaking to his disciples in the upper room during the last supper. He was mere hours away from being betrayed by Judas, mocked, accused, and finally crucified on a wooden cross to die. No doubt the disciples didn’t fully understand Jesus’s words while they ate that night. But they would understand later.

Jesus exemplified what it means to sacrificially serve others. Jesus, on the cross of Calvary, did for sinners what they are unable to do for themselves: He paid the price for sin. He bore the wrath of God. And through His death, He wiped away the sin debt of all who would call on the Lord with faith in the gospel and in repentance of sin.

Christians can’t offer themselves up as a sacrifice for the sins of another. They can, however, follow their Savior’s example by loving one another in sacrificial ways that reflect the divine love Jesus portrayed at Calvary.

Love means sacrificing oneself for the beloved. When Jesus said, “love one another as I have loved you,” He meant Christians should love their spouse, children, fellow church members, and neighbors in a sacrificial way. He meant Christians ought to put the good of the beloved before their own good. The Christian’s acts of love should be characterized by selflessness and other-centeredness.

This is why John said that when a Christian sees their brother in need, then they will certainly supply that need as they are able. This is what Christians do. They may need to be instructed in this and encouraged to act, but true Christians won't have to be guilty or manipulated into loving their brothers and sisters. True followers of Christ love each other as Jesus loved them. Those who don't love as Christ loved haven't experienced the love of Christ. Those who don't know Christ don't love like Christ.

- **How did you experience a change in the way you loved others when you became a Christian? How do you still need to grow in this area?**

> Have someone in your group read 1 John 3:18.

The Bible is emphatic that those who claim to love God but refuse to love their brothers and sisters are liars. In other words, it isn't possible to be a true Christian and hate your neighbor. That's an impossible scenario. John put it this way, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister" (1 John 4:19-21).

Christians love others by being self-sacrificial. They also love others by being truthful. One of the most loving things a Christian can do is humbly and gently tell others the truth.

- **John wrote that love should not be in word only but also in deed and truth. What did John mean when he said Christians should love in truth?**

Christians love in truth when they speak and act in a way that aligns with the truth found in God's Word. When we do this, we speak of the actual condition of human souls before God. There is nothing more important to speak truthfully about.

The only way for someone to know God is if God reveals Himself to them. God must make Himself known if His creation will draw near to Him and understand the truth about Him. God, however, is under no obligation to reveal Himself. He owes no one this kindness. God doesn't need people and He would still be perfectly good and holy if He chose to remain shrouded in complete mystery and left us to grope in the dark. In fact, because of the sinfulness of man, this is what we deserve.

But God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creation. From Genesis to Revelation, we see God's constant kindness and mercy toward mankind. His revelation culminates in the person of Jesus Christ, God in flesh. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son." Jesus Christ revealed the Word of God to His disciples. And because of God's care and provision for all Christians in all times, He has preserved His Word in written form for us today. The very words Jesus spoke to His disciples that He learned from his Father are preserved for us!

- **Why is it loving to live and speak toward someone in accordance with what is true? Why would it be unloving to not do this?**

According to the example and words of Jesus, it is loving to share with someone the Word of God. What could be more loving than to explain to another what God has said about the condition and salvation of their eternal soul? Like the disciples then, people today are sheep that have gone their own way. They are in desperate need of instruction concerning God's nature, will, and provision for their lives.

Christians are in desperate need of God's Word. Just as a baby must be nourished to grow, Christians receive nourishment from the Word of God for the prospering of their souls. This doesn't mean that people will always receive God's Word as an act of love, but that doesn't change the fact that it is loving to share it.

Sadly, our society has decided saying anything that may offend another is unloving, even if it is true. Telling someone that they are a sinner in need of a Savior is not loving according to our culture today. In fact, this kind of activity is often labeled as hate speech. Christians should always deal with others in humility, kindness, and mercy. But humility, kindness, and mercy should be paired with a clear announcement of the Word of God. To deny people the truth about God is one of the most unloving things a person can do.

- **Is it possible for an act of love to be offensive? Why or why not?**

> Have someone in your group read **1 John 3:18**.

A Christian's love should be characterized by selflessness and truth. Jesus loved His disciples in a tangible, sacrificial way through His death on the cross. He also loved them by telling them God's Word for the good of their souls. Jesus loved them in word and in deed.

- **What role do good works play in our efforts to love others in a biblical way?**

Christians have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and they are to do the good works that they were made to do in Him (Ephesians 2:10). Christians are a fruit-bearing people. The fruit they bear is their obedience to the Scriptures. When Christians obey God's work and produce much fruit, they are filled with joy and peace.

As Christians grow in faith and walk in step with the Spirit, they produce fruit. This is the kindness of the Lord working on behalf of His children, for the children of God will have a growing desire to serve the purposes of their Father. Blood-bought Christians long to do God's will.

- **What does it look like practically for Christians to love others in action? How do we do this for one another in the church?**

Christians love their fellow believer when they spur them on to good works. The writer of Hebrews exhorted, "And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Christians should look for opportunities so spur one another on to do God's will in their lives. They can know God's will by looking at God's Word. Christians aren't left to guess what God might have them do. He has already laid it out clearly. When a Christian spurs another Christian on to obey what the Scriptures say, it is a great service to that believer's soul. As Christians obey the Scriptures more and more, their joy in Christ increases more and more.

- **When has someone encouraged you toward good works? How did you receive that encouragement?**

APPLICATION

Christians have experienced the amazing love of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They have been made new creatures and given new affections. The result of the transformation is that they can now love. Love consists of sacrificing oneself for the spiritual good of another. Christians love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Not only that but they also love their brother and sister. In fact, this is so fundamental to the life of a Christian, that John said a person who doesn't love their brother and sister is not a Christian at all.

- **How much does love for others characterize your life? What evidence does this give of your relationship with Jesus?**

- **What are some obstacles to loving a fellow Christian? Those outside of the church?**

- **Are there people in our church to whom you have withheld love because of hurt feelings or an offense? What steps should you take for reconciliation?**

PRAY

Give thanks to God for the great love He has shown you by sending Christ to die on the cross for your sins. Ask the Lord to give all the members of our church a deep affection for one another. Pray that old offenses will be forgiven and that reconciliation will be accomplished as we seek to love one another as Christ commanded.

1 JOHN 3:16-18

In stark contrast to this unspeakable hatred is Jesus' remarkable love. We can understand what love is by looking at Jesus' example. He laid down his life for us. We ought to be prepared to do the same for one another. While the necessity of laying down our lives for one another is rare, the necessity of helping meet one another's needs is not. The true test of a Christian's love is not his words (loving with words or tongue) but his willingness to sacrifice for the sake of his brother ... to love with actions and in truth.²

Notes:

REFERENCES

1. Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial; The Saint's Spiritual Delight; The Holy Eucharist; and Other Treatises* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1848), 73.
2. David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, vol. 11, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).